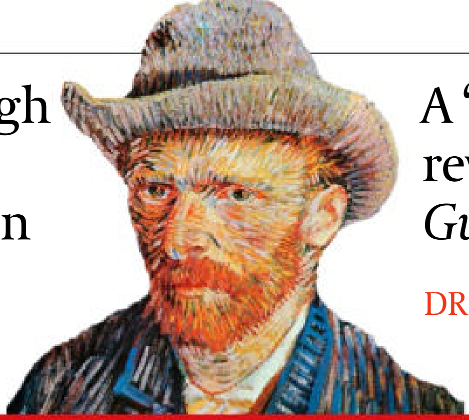
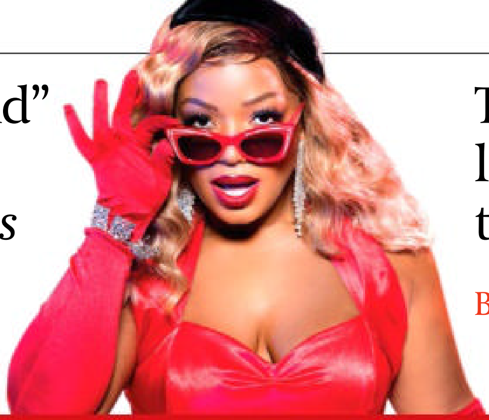
How van Gogh was saved from oblivion

LAST WORD *P52*



A "solid-gold" revival of *Guys & Dolls*

DRAMA *P28*



The baleful legacy of the Iraq War

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THE BEST OF THE BRITISH AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

Xi Jinping in Moscow

A challenge to the West?

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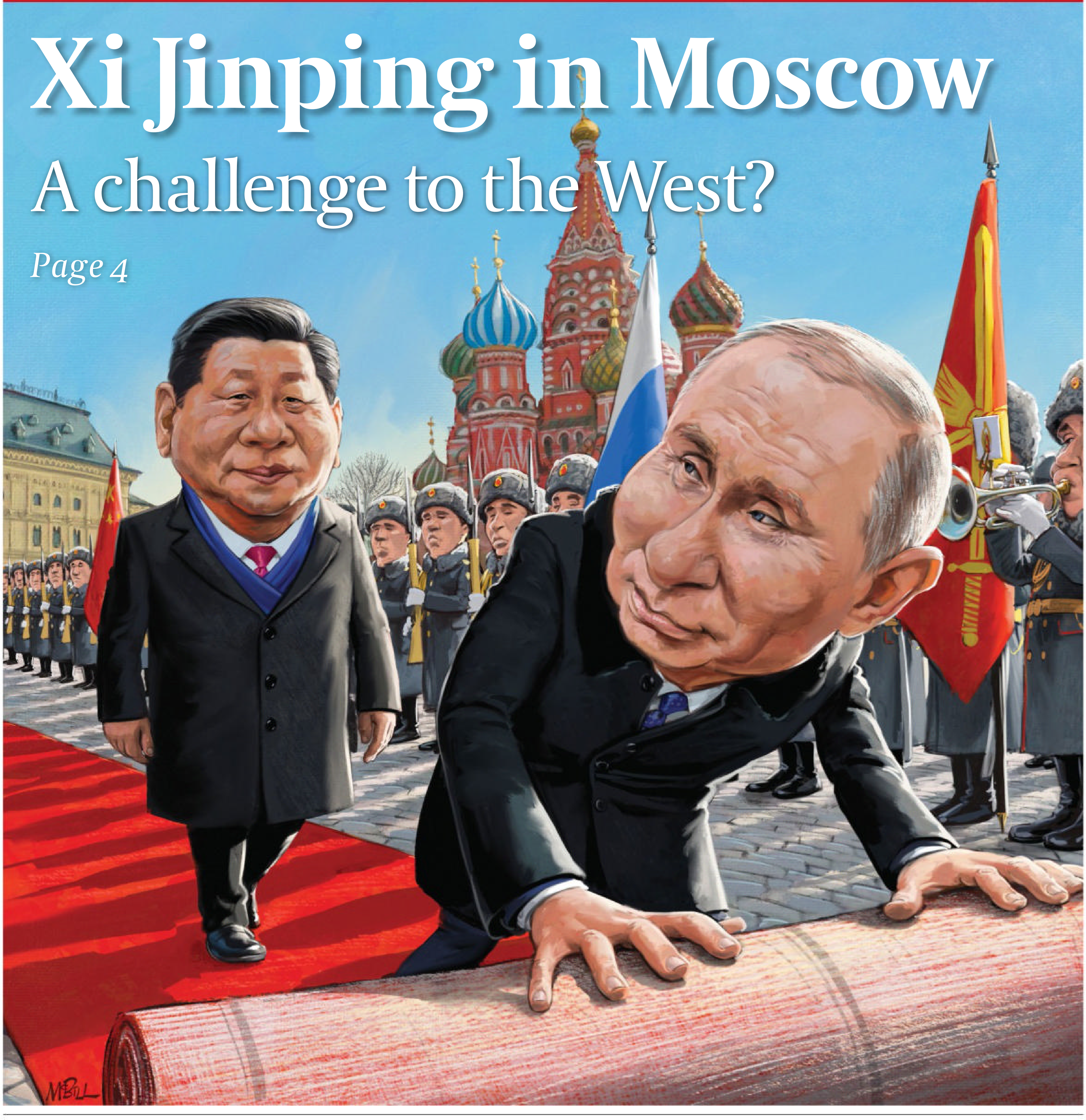

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What happened

Xi's visit to Putin

Vladimir Putin welcomed the Chinese president Xi Jinping to Moscow this week, for a three-day state visit designed to cement their countries' strategic partnership. Putin called Xi a "dear friend" and said the pair had spent a long time discussing China's 12-point "peace plan" for Ukraine, which was published last month. Xi, in turn, praised Putin's "strong leadership", and said China would "continue to work with Russia to firmly safeguard the international order". He didn't publicly commit to supplying any weapons to Russia. The US criticised Xi's visit, saying it was providing diplomatic cover for Russia to continue committing atrocities in Ukraine. Meanwhile in Kyiv, the Japanese PM, Fumio Kishida, met with the Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky.

The visit came days after the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Putin on charges of alleged involvement in the mass abduction of children from Ukraine (*see page 7*). In what was interpreted as a defiant response, Putin last weekend made a surprise visit to the Russian-occupied Ukrainian city of Mariupol, touring it by night.

Putin with his "most intimate friend"

What the editorials said

Xi makes an "unlikely" peacemaker, given his government's atrocious human rights record, said The Independent, but he appears to be "on something of a roll". Fresh from helping soothe relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia (*see page 16*), he's now touting a plan to stop the fighting in Ukraine. He recognises that China, as "the workshop of the world and the principal exporting power on Earth", has an interest in stability. Xi is only posing as a peacemaker, said The Times. His 12-point plan, which imposes no obligation on Russia to withdraw from any Ukrainian territory, is clearly a non-starter.

China's president is being disingenuous, said the Daily Mail. His real aim is to prevent a Russian defeat and keep the war in Ukraine dragging on, in order to "bleed the West ... dry of money, weapons and resolve". This, he doubtless hopes, will have the effect of reducing resistance to any Chinese invasion of Taiwan. Xi's ultimate objective, said The Observer, is "to advance his claim to lead an alternative, non-democratic, illiberal world order". Just as America played the "China card" against the Soviet Union with Richard Nixon's historic visit to Beijing in 1972, so Xi is now hoping to use his Russian alliance "to weaken and thwart the US".

What happened

The rot inside the Met

The Metropolitan Police is institutionally racist, sexist and homophobic and needs additional oversight after losing the trust of the public, an excoriating review concluded this week. Commissioned after the murder of Sarah Everard by a serving officer in 2021, Baroness [Louise] Casey's 363-page report said that the force is beset by "systemic and fundamental" issues, including a culture in which criticism is met by "defensiveness and denial". It found that discrimination is "baked into the system", and that bullying in the ranks is rife. The report suggested that the Met could be broken up if sufficient progress is not made in fixing the problems identified.

Casey, a cross-bench peer, detailed a litany of failings. She found that rape kits containing evidence were stored in broken fridges, and that cases were dropped owing to police errors; in one case, a fridge full of evidence was ruined when someone left their lunchbox in it. Rape and domestic violence victims were made to feel like an "inconvenience" by officers. Sexism in the force is so rife that officers didn't even hide it when visited by Casey's team, who observed women being spoken over and put down. Some 12% of women in the Met said they'd been harassed or attacked at work. The report also outlined examples of a "toxic" and racist work environment: a Muslim officer found bacon stuffed in his boots; a Sikh officer had his beard cut; black officers were 81% more likely to be in the misconduct system than white colleagues. Examples of "pranks" by officers included sex toys being slipped into coffee mugs and urine being thrown at cars.

Casey urged the Met to implement all 16 of her recommendations, which include an overhaul of the investigation of sexual violence, stricter vetting standards, and radical changes to some specialist units singled out for criticism. Met Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley, who was only appointed in September, apologised to Londoners, but declined to use the term "institutional" in relation to the problems in his force, calling it "ambiguous". London's Mayor, Sadiq Khan, said the review's publication marked "one of the darkest days" in the 194-year history of the capital's police force.

Casey: excoriating

It wasn't all bad

A village in North Yorkshire is to dim its streetlights and dozens of other outdoor lights to allow residents and visitors to have a better view of the stars. Hawnby is located in the North York Moors National Park, which is one of just 21 officially recognised international "dark sky reserves". The measures, which have widespread local support, have given better views of the Milky Way, planets and meteors – and, when conditions are right, the Northern Lights.

Beavers are to return to west London for the first time in 400 years, as part of a rewilding project. A breeding pair of Eurasian beavers, which are expected to come from Tayside in Scotland, could arrive at their new home in a wetland in Ealing as soon as this autumn. Once the beavers have settled in, Londoners will be able go on "beaver safaris" to observe the animals in their habitat. It is hoped that the beavers – which were once common across Britain, until they were hunted to extinction in the 16th century – will help to manage vegetation and reduce flood risk.

A former soldier whose Norfolk bungalow had been teetering on the edge of a crumbling cliff has managed to drag the entire building to safety. When Lance Martin, 65, bought the house in 2017, he was assured that the nearby cliffs wouldn't erode for decades – but they soon did, and the council told him that unless he could move his home out of harm's way, it would have to be demolished. Helped by friends, and using canvas straps and a 13-tonne digger, he pulled the wooden house to safety hours before the council's deadline last Thursday.

COVER CARTOON: HOWARD MCWILLIAM

…and how they were covered

What the commentators said

Putin pulled out all the stops for Xi, said Pjotr Sauer in The Guardian. There was none of the "long-table diplomacy" reserved for Western dignitaries. The two leaders spoke for more than four hours on Monday before enjoying a seven-course dinner. In a rare move, Putin personally escorted Xi to his car. There is a real warmth between Xi and the man he describes as his "best, most intimate friend", said Stuart Lau on Politico. The "bromance" dates back ten years and partly reflects their similar backgrounds – born eight months apart, they both had fathers who were active in WWII, both knew hardship as children, and both have daughters.

The pair are also united by their "shared grievances with the US-led global order", said Katie Stallard in The Sunday Times. But this visit wasn't really based on friendship or ideology. For Putin, it was a chance to bask in China's reflected power and to show that Russia is not isolated. For Xi, it was a chance to bolster an ally whose political demise and replacement with a pro-Western leader would be a "strategic nightmare for China". Putin's weakness has also presented many advantageous trading opportunities for China, which still relies on Russia for advanced weapons knowhow, and likes having a nearby source of cheap natural resources.

Now that Russia is so reliant on trade with China, there's no hiding the growing power imbalance between the two nations, said Max Seddon in the FT. "The logic of events dictates that we fully become a Chinese resource colony", a Kremlin insider said this week. "Our servers will be from Huawei. We will be China's major suppliers of everything… By the end of 2023 the yuan will be our main trade currency." This will give Beijing huge leverage over Russia, said Alexander Gabuev in The Economist. What price will China demand for its continued support for the Kremlin? A naval presence in the Russian Arctic? A say over Russia's policies towards India? In his blinkered drive to destroy Ukraine and humiliate the West, Putin has mortgaged his country to Beijing. "The tragedy for Russia" is that even after he departs the scene, the "new setup of a giant Eurasian dictatorship subservient to Chinese overlords will probably survive".

What next?

Xi and Putin reportedly signed two joint documents detailing future economic cooperation, says the FT, but Xi held back from confirming plans for a crucial pipeline to reroute Russia's gas exports from Europe to Asia. He invited Putin to visit China later this year.

Putin warned that the UK's recent decision to supply armour-piercing shells containing depleted uranium to Kyiv would prompt a response, claiming that it showed the West was already using "weapons with a nuclear component". Britain dismissed this, saying that depleted uranium had nothing to do with nuclear weapons and was a "standard component" used by many forces, including Russia's.

What the commentators said

"A more brutal dissection of an organisation's failings is hard to imagine," said The Times. We know that the Met has recruited officers capable of "heinous crimes" and harboured them for years within its ranks; yet even today, 380 of the 548 officers currently under investigation for sexual wrongdoing or domestic violence are still attending work. It is criticised for allowing predatory behaviour to flourish in specialist units with a reputation as "dark corners" of the force; for the appalling and widespread bigotry within its ranks; for its "almost non-existent" neighbourhood policing in London; and for the "abuse of stop-and-search powers", which disproportionately affect black people. Casey paints a truly damning picture, agreed The Guardian. The model of policing by consent is "broken"; public trust in the Met has collapsed. And no wonder: less than 1% of officers accused of two breaches of standards have been fired from the Met since 2013; even the commissioner admits that one in ten officers shouldn't have got through vetting. This isn't just a few bad apples; "the rot goes all the way through".

We've had landmark reviews into the Met before, said Sue Fish in The Guardian – including the 1981 Scarman report and the 1999 Macpherson inquiry, both of which exposed institutional racism. "But none have been quite so damning, comprehensive and well-evidenced as Casey's." And none have made such a powerful case for reform, said Danny Shaw in The Spectator. Yes, the Met has faced challenges, not least a real-terms budget cut of 18% since 2010. But many of its problems are self-inflicted and stem from its own "prejudiced and defensive" culture, casting doubt on whether the well-intentioned Rowley can effect the change that's necessary. Politicians must seize this chance to reform the Met, said Stephen Bush in the FT. Casey is a figure who commands cross-party respect, and there's a growing political consensus that a reckoning for the force is overdue. If there's going to be a time for that to happen, "it's surely now or never".

What next?

Casey's report also recommends that a new, independent team of officers be brought in by the Met to reform its handling of misconduct cases; that a board is set up, headed by the Mayor of London, to oversee progress on reform; and that steps are taken to address the over-centralised structure of policing in the capital.

Some policing figures think the Met is "too far gone" for effective reform, says Fiona Hamilton in The Times, and that some of its national responsibilities, such as counter-terrorism, will need to be hived off to the National Crime Agency.

THE WEEK

Of course, there are no easy solutions for the crises bedevilling modern Britain, but sometimes people come up with fresh ideas for easing them. In The Times this week, for instance, Francis Elliott proposed that one simple way to relieve the care crisis might be to offer care workers free parking (*see page 14*). Similarly heartening are reports of the community groups taking matters into their own hands – such as the volunteers who make it their mission to pick up the litter off the sides of Britain's roads. Every weekend they go out, and come back with bags full of waste – from plastic bottles and coffee cups to old tyres. Rather less heartening, however, is the bureaucratic hurdles faced by these volunteers. According to a report in The Sunday Times, some have spent months if not years wrangling with officialdom about how to dispose of the waste they've collected. Waste centres won't take it, because it is an offence to dispose of third-party waste without a licence; many councils refuse to collect it, because it is not household waste. The Environment Agency does acknowledge that the litter pickers are working for the public good, and has altered its guidance in an effort to help – but the rules are still so complex that some volunteers have had to form partnerships with private waste-disposal firms. It sounds mad. And it makes you wonder: if the Government can't find a workaround for a problem like this, what hope does it have of overcoming infinitely larger challenges such as meeting carbon emissions targets?

Caroline Law

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Controversy of the week

A Budget for hard times

Hunt: “a step in the right direction”

“If the Tories do manage to pull off a surprise victory at the next election, we may look back on the past month as the point at which their fortunes turned,” said the Daily Mail. After the “tumult” of the Liz Truss era, there is a sense that “order and purpose” are being restored – a sense reinforced by Jeremy Hunt’s first Budget as Chancellor last week, designed to “supercharge” growth and get Britain “back to work”. It was certainly “a step in the right direction”, said the FT. Hunt benefitted from a slight improvement in the economic picture: the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) now predicts that the UK will avoid a recession this year. He used this new flexibility to opt for measures that should “directly unlock growth while staying within fiscal constraints”. Most “eye-catching” was the plan for a major expansion of free childcare (*see page 18*), encouraging parents back into the workforce. Corporation tax will still rise from 19% to 25% as planned, but this will be offset by rules allowing all capital expenditure to be set against tax – a “welcome step to help turbocharge investment”.

“There is an old Westminster adage that a budget that looks good on the day will look terrible in the morning,” said The Independent. Hunt’s was one of those. The most troublesome aspect was his reform to the size of the pension pots that people can amass free of tax over their lifetimes (*see page 46*). The cap, previously set at about £1m, had the unintended consequence of blunting senior NHS doctors’ incentive to work. Hunt didn’t just raise the cap, he abolished it altogether. This, to many, looks like “a gratuitous bung to the wealthiest in society”, allowing them to amass vast sums tax-free and pass them on to their children. Hunt also “decided to hand cash over to motorists, the Armed Forces and big business”, said The Guardian. “By happy coincidence”, these are exactly the constituencies beloved of Tory backbenchers. By contrast, the Chancellor found that there was little money available to improve pay for striking public sector workers. This was an “austerity” Budget, in all but name.

Hunt “played a bad hand relatively well”, said Duncan Weldon in The New Statesman. “He made some sensible decisions”, and he avoided “any obvious blunders”. But despite his best efforts to sound optimistic, the OBR’s predictions make grim reading. Real household disposable income, an accurate measure of living standards, is set to fall by a cumulative 5.7% over 2022-23 and 2023-24. That is the “worst hit” since records began in 1956-57. This “safety-first” Budget may turn out to be a missed opportunity, said Andrew Neil in the Daily Mail. Hunt sprayed a lot of money around, but gave “not a penny for tax cuts”. The corporation tax hike is driving businesses away; and for the rest of us, the tax burden will rise to 37.3% next year, the highest since the Second World War. If growth continues to flatline this year,then, come the next election, Hunt will have “a lot of explaining to do”.

Braverman in Rwanda
Suella Braverman paid an official visit to Rwanda last week, shortly after insisting that the country had the capacity to take in “many thousands” of asylum seekers deported from the UK. During the two-day trip, the Home Secretary toured buildings on the outskirts of Kigali that could be used to accommodate migrants, and had a 45-minute meeting with Rwanda’s president, Paul Kagame. No migrants have been sent to Rwanda yet, nearly a year after the deportation deal was struck by Braverman’s predecessor, Priti Patel. The Government was accused of trying to limit negative media coverage of Braverman’s visit by only inviting journalists from right-wing outlets on the taxpayer-funded trip.

Brexit deal passes
MPs voted emphatically in favour of Rishi Sunak’s new Brexit deal for Northern Ireland this week, although 22 Tory MPs rebelled. Boris Johnson and Liz Truss were among the Conservatives who defied a three-line whip by joining Northern Ireland’s DUP in voting against the so-called Windsor Framework; but it still passed by 515 votes to 29. Unveiled last month, the plan is intended to ease frictions created by the region’s post-Brexit trading arrangements.

Spirit of the age

Magnums and chocolate buttons have been identified as the latest victims of “shrinkflation”, The Daily Telegraph reports. Cadbury has not put up the price of its “Big Share” bags of Dairy Milk buttons, but it has reduced the amount of chocolate in them, from 240g to 184.8g, while Magnum is now selling three ice creams in its multipacks, down from four.

An academic paper was published this month warning that artificial intelligence poses a major risk “in relation to honesty and plagiarism” in academia. The paper was, it now emerges, written by the AI chatbot ChatGPT. “We wanted to show that ChatGPT is writing at a very high level,” said Prof Debby Cotton, who pretended to be the paper’s lead author.

Good week for:

Finland, which was named the world’s happiest country for the sixth year in a row. Britain slipped two places to 19th in the UN’s World Happiness Report, based on data from the Gallup World Poll. Eight of the nations in the top ten were European. Lebanon and Afghanistan came last. It also found that satisfaction rates had remained remarkably stable since 2020, despite the pandemic.

Jilly Cooper, as an all-star cast for the new TV adaptation of her classic bonkbuster *Rivals* was confirmed. Among those appearing in the eight-part series, set in the cut-throat world of 1980s TV, will be David Tennant, Danny Dyer and *Poldark*’s Aidan Turner.

Bad week for:

Civil servants and ministers, who were banned from having TikTok on their work phones. TikTok is owned by a Chinese firm, ByteDance, leading to fears that it could be forced to hand its data to the Chinese state. Secretary of State Oliver Dowden described the ban as “good cyber hygiene”.

Rail commuters, with new figures showing that the TransPennine Express cancelled nearly a quarter of its services in the four weeks to 4 March. The operator, which covers routes in northern England and Scotland, has been affected by drivers no longer volunteering to work paid overtime shifts.

The MCC, which was forced into a U-turn over its decision to drop the two oldest fixtures at Lord’s: Eton vs. Harrow and the Varsity Match. A survey of the club’s 24,350 members indicated that, by a slim margin, both fixtures should be retained. These will now be played for at least the next five summers.

Poll watch

Only **6%** of UK voters expect to be left better off by last week’s Budget. **56%** believe it will not make much difference to their lives, while **25%** think it will make them worse off. **26%** of voters believe the Government is handling the economy well.
YouGov/The Times

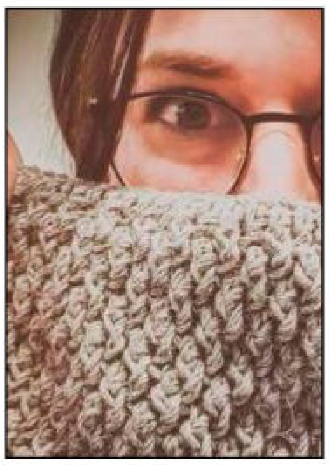
43% of voters in Great Britain trust Labour to improve public services. **17%** trust the Conservatives.
Opinium/The Observer

More adults in Great Britain believe the BBC has a right-wing bias (**24%**) than a left-wing bias (**21%**). A quarter (**26%**) think it is “generally neutral”. BBC News has a net trust rating of **+14%** (**40%** trust it, **26%** distrust it) down from **+21%** in August. ITV’s is **+23**.
Opinium/The Observer

Europe at a glance

Amsterdam

Shock win for farmers: A rural populist party, launched in the Netherlands in 2019 on the back of a wave of protests by farmers, has emerged as the big winner in the provincial elections that determine the make-up of the upper house of the Dutch parliament. The Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB) won 15 seats in the senate with almost 20% of the vote, putting it ahead of Dutch PM Mark Rutte's centre-right People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, which was left with only ten seats. The result – in a poll viewed as a ballot on the government's record – caps a remarkable rise for the BBB, which was founded with the single aim of blocking government plans to slash levels of nitrogen pollution from farms. Analysts said that the election result may delay the implementation of those plans, and complicate the government's ability to secure the majorities it needs to pass other legislation, in areas such as immigration.

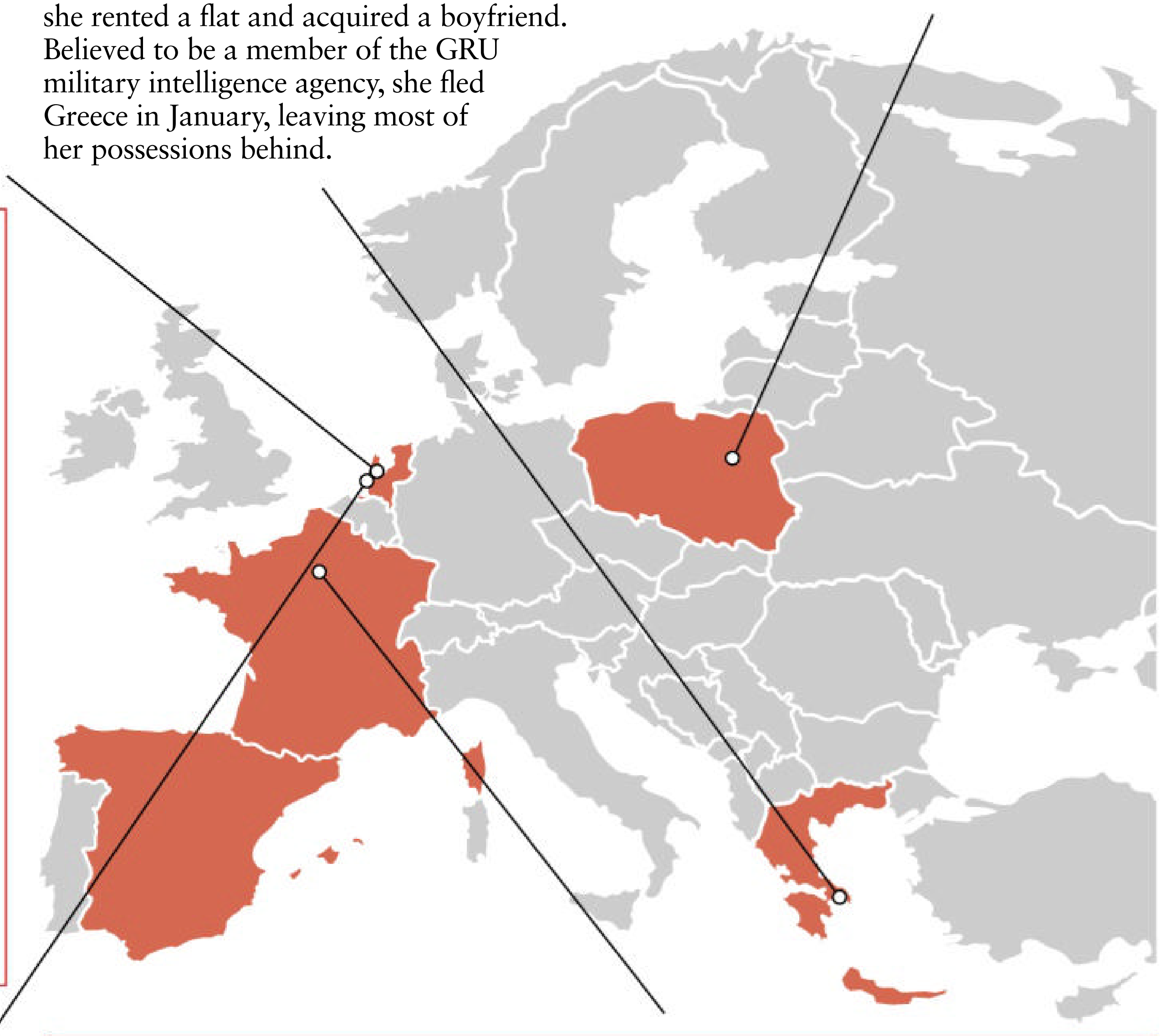


Athens

Spy yarn: The Greek intelligence service has identified an alleged Russian spy, who was using a knitting and craft shop in Athens as her cover. Irina Alexandrova Smireva is believed to have arrived in Greece from an unspecified Latin American country in 2018. Soon after, she assumed the identity of Maria Tsalla, a Greek child who'd died a few days after her birth in 1991, and later opened the store in Athens, where she rented a flat and acquired a boyfriend. Believed to be a member of the GRU military intelligence agency, she fled Greece in January, leaving most of her possessions behind.

Warsaw

Jets escalation: Poland and Slovakia were poised this week to become the first Nato members to send fighter jets to Ukraine. Poland's President Duda announced last week that a first instalment of four Soviet-era MiG-29s, inherited from East Germany after the fall of the Iron Curtain, would be sent within days, and that it would transfer additional jets once these had been serviced and repaired. A day later, Slovakia's PM Eduard Heger said his country was now ready to proceed with a plan to send 13 MiG-29s that it had retired in August. Moscow reacted angrily to the news, saying that "all this equipment will be destroyed". Kyiv has been asking its Western allies for jets, though ideally it would like modern US-made F-16s.



Gran Canaria, Spain

Octopus farm: A multinational company is planning to raise up to a million octopuses a year for food in the world's first intensive octopus farm, confidential documents have revealed. When Nueva Pescanova announced its plans two years ago, it said that the farm was necessary to protect wild populations in the face of growing global demand for octopus meat. But the details seen by the BBC have dismayed rights campaigners and led to calls for the Spanish government to intervene. The papers reveal that the famously intelligent and solitary creatures would be raised in 1,000 communal tanks, in a two-storey building in Las Palmas in Gran Canaria. The animals would then be killed by being plunged into -3°C ice water, a method that studies have suggested causes them a slow, stressful death.

The Hague, Netherlands

Putin wanted: The International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin, accusing the Russian president of being responsible for war crimes in Ukraine. The case centres on the alleged abduction and forcible deportation to Russia of thousands of Ukrainian children since the invasion last year; a warrant has also been issued for Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia's commissioner for children's rights. The Kremlin dismissed the warrants as "outrageous and unacceptable", but Ukraine's President Zelensky welcomed their issue, saying that at least 16,000 children had been removed from the country. Russia is not a member of the ICC, and the court does not conduct trials in absentia, so Putin and Lvova-Belova are only likely to be tried if they travel to one of 123 countries that are members of the ICC, and which are legally obliged to execute the warrants it issues.

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Paris

Pensions anger: President Macron narrowly survived an attempt to bring down his government this week over his controversial plans to reform the pension system. The no-confidence motion fell just nine votes short of the 287 needed to pass. Its failure means that the legislation to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 will become law, Macron having earlier used an executive order to force it through parliament without a vote. However, the bill's opponents immediately vowed that the fight was not over, and in the hours after the result was announced, demonstrations broke out in Paris, where more than 100 people were arrested, and in cities across the country.

Protests over the reforms, which Macron insists are necessary to prevent the pension system going bust, have been ongoing since January, but have intensified in the past couple of weeks. In Paris, waste has been piling up on the streets owing to rolling strikes by rubbish collectors; elsewhere, strikes and blockades at oil refineries have raised fears that there could be fuel shortages. Schools have closed, and transport systems have been brought to a near standstill. In the week to Tuesday, more than 1,000 unauthorised demonstrations were reported, some of which were violent. Unions vowed to stage more strikes later this week.

The world at a glance

Little Rock, Arkansas

Anti-abortion monument: A controversial bill that provides for a "monument to the unborn" to be erected on the grounds of the Arkansas State Capitol has been signed into law by the state's Republican governor, Sarah Huckabee Sanders. The purpose of the memorial is, according to the bill, to commemorate "unborn children aborted during the era of Roe v. Wade". That era came to an end last year, when the US supreme court struck down Roe v. Wade, thereby giving effect to a law Arkansas had approved in 2019 banning all abortions except those done to save the mother's life. The new law requires state officials to oversee the selection of an artist and design for the memorial, with input from groups funding the project. However, even some anti-abortion Republicans have objected to the memorial, saying that it only serves to fuel the culture war.

TICK TOCK TIMES UP!
TICK TOCK TIMES UP!
TICK TOCK TIMES UP!

New York

Trump arrest: Police forces were on alert in cities across America this week, readying themselves for the unrest likely to break out in the event of Donald Trump's arrest. The former president is being investigated by New York prosecutors over the $130,000 in hush money he is said to have paid before the 2016 election to Stormy Daniels, the porn actress with whom he'd allegedly been having an affair. Paying hush money is not illegal, but classing Trump's reimbursement as "legal fees" owed to his lawyer, allegedly to obscure the Daniels payment, could violate federal election laws. (The lawyer in question, Michael Cohen, has pleaded guilty to paying the hush money.) In a social media post last week, Trump predicted he'd be arrested and, as in the aftermath of the 2020 election, he urged supporters to take action. "Protest, take our nation back," he wrote. On Monday, barricades were installed outside Manhattan's criminal court – where Trump is likely to be taken – and the police presence was beefed up in Washington DC. If Trump is indicted, it would be the first time a US president has faced criminal charges after leaving office.

Tegucigalpa

The tilt to China: The president of Honduras, until last week one of the few remaining allies of Taiwan, has announced that in the interests of "pragmatism", her government will now seek full diplomatic ties with Beijing. The subtext, which she did not spell out, is that this involves cutting all ties with Taiwan. President Xiomara Castro's change in policy comes weeks after she let it be known that she was negotiating with China to build a hydroelectric dam. The switch, which radically complicates Honduras's relations with the US, its largest trading partner, is a clear sign of China's growing influence in Central America: in recent years it has won over El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic. Belize and Guatemala are now the only countries in the region formally to recognise Taiwan, which is left with only 13 formal diplomatic allies worldwide, compared with 22 in 2016.

Key West, Florida

Stinky seaweed: Florida's beaches may soon be covered in foul-smelling detritus because a huge belt of rotting brown seaweed, 5,000 miles long and weighing ten million tonnes, is heading for the Gulf of Mexico. According to scientists, the Great Atlantic Sargassum Belt has grown so fast since it was first observed between West Africa and the Caribbean in 2011, it can be seen from space. It's a vital habitat for marine life, but it also emits hydrogen sulphide and other toxins, which cause it to smell like rotten eggs once it washes ashore. Vast amounts of the weed have already been reported on beaches in Key West and Cancún, Mexico; more is expected this summer.

New York

Epstein decision: A federal judge has given the go-ahead for lawsuits to be brought against two leading banks, JPMorgan and Deutsche Bank, which are accused of facilitating the sex crimes of the convicted offender Jeffrey Epstein. The financier, who killed himself in 2019 while awaiting trial on sex-trafficking charges, owned a 75-acre private island in the US Virgin Islands, which the Islands' attorney general has described as "the perfect hideaway ... for trafficking underage girls for sexual servitude". The banks, both of which had Epstein as a client, are being sued by two women who claim Epstein sexually abused them, and by the US Virgin Islands' government. This week US district judge Jed Rakoff, while dismissing some of their claims, allowed both parties to proceed with their case that the banks had "knowingly benefitted from participating in a sex-trafficking venture" run by Epstein.

Buenos Aires

Economic meltdown: A severe drought hitting grain exports, crippling exchange controls, and inflation soaring above 100% have brought Argentina to the verge of economic collapse. Prices rose by 6.6% between January and February, in large part due to a 20% increase in the price of meat, which has soared owing to the impact of the prolonged heatwave on livestock farms. There are grounds for optimism, however: the Vaca Muerta development in Patagonia, the world's second-biggest shale gasfield, will soon start pumping gas, potentially turning the country's energy trade deficit into a surplus. And in the north, the boom in lithium, an indispensable component of the electronics industry, is transforming Argentina into a major supplier.

The world at a glance

Sfax, Tunisia

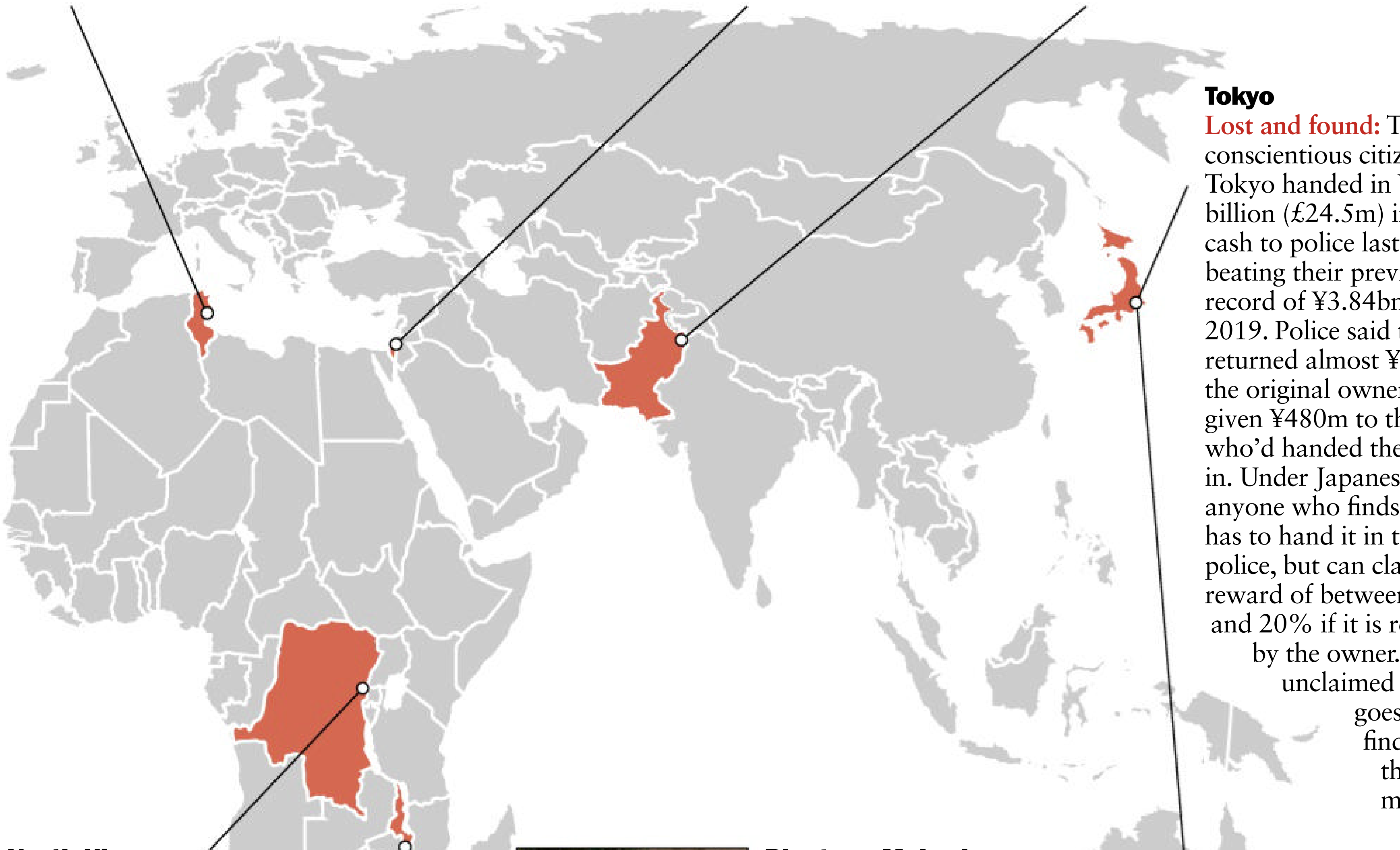
Migrants flee: A wave of violence against sub-Saharan African migrants in Tunisia, sparked by an inflammatory speech by Tunisia's president, has driven many to flee by boat to Italy. UN statistics estimate that about 12,000 of the 20,500 migrants who have arrived by sea in Italy this year left from Tunisia, up from around 1,000 last year: in one March week alone, 3,300 people attempted the dangerous crossing. Since President Saied declared a crackdown on "illegal" migration, labelling it a conspiracy to alter Tunisia's "demographic make-up", hundreds of migrants (and some black Tunisians) have been set on by mobs, arbitrarily arrested, evicted from their homes or fired from their jobs. It's estimated there are some 20,000 to 50,000 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa in Tunisia, a country of 12 million people.

Jerusalem

Judicial reform: The Israeli PM, Benjamin Netanyahu, has announced plans to soften his government's highly divisive overhaul of Israel's judicial system. The reforms – which strengthen executive control over supreme court appointments and introduce an "override clause", allowing a simple majority of 61 MPs to ignore a court ruling – have sparked massive public protests and drawn fierce international criticism. The ruling coalition of nationalist and religious parties, widely seen as the most right-wing in Israel's history, says the reforms are a much-needed check on rampant judicial power. Opponents say that they undermine democracy and that the proposed concessions, giving the government marginally less control over the process for appointing supreme court judges, are no more than a token gesture.

Lahore, Pakistan

Showdown: There were clashes outside Imran Khan's house in Lahore last week, as his supporters fought to prevent police from arresting him for failing to appear in court (he later appeared in court in Islamabad). The former PM has faced dozens of charges since being ousted from office in a vote of no confidence last April. Whether the corruption charges against Khan are politically motivated, as he insists, his standoff with the Pakistani authorities has left the country on the brink of chaos.

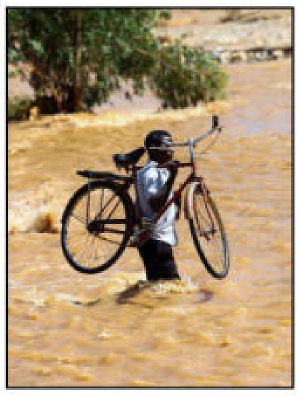


Tokyo

Lost and found: The conscientious citizens of Tokyo handed in ¥3.99 billion (£24.5m) in lost cash to police last year, beating their previous record of ¥3.84bn, in 2019. Police said they had returned almost ¥3bn to the original owners, and given ¥480m to those who'd handed the cash in. Under Japanese law, anyone who finds money has to hand it in to the police, but can claim a reward of between 5% and 20% if it is retrieved by the owner. All unclaimed cash goes to the finder after three months.

North Kivu, DRC

UK accused: As Britain finalises its migrant deal with Rwanda, the leader of neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, Felix Tshisekedi, has upbraided it for "turning a blind eye" to abuses by Rwanda's regime. The regime stands accused by both the US and the EU of arming a rebel militia that has been fighting DRC forces in the mineral-rich DRC province of North Kivu for some time. The militia, known as M23, is notorious for carrying out massacres and mass rapes. Half a million people have been displaced in the conflict. "How can a country with great values like the UK compromise with such acquaintances?" said Tshisekedi in an interview last week, describing Rwanda's President Kagame as a criminal, bloodthirsty dictator.



Blantyre, Malawi

Deadly storm: Tropical cyclone Freddy tore across Mozambique and Malawi last week, causing severe flooding and landslides, killing hundreds of people and displacing tens of thousands more. The storm first hit Madagascar and Mozambique in late February, then moved back across the Indian Ocean before making landfall again in March. Experts said that Freddy was likely to prove the longest-lasting cyclone ever recorded. The UN, which has set up a relief coordination centre in Blantyre, has expressed fears that the resulting floods could exacerbate the cholera outbreak Malawi has faced over the past year, its deadliest ever.

Tokyo

Mending ties: Japan's PM, Fumio Kishida, and South Korea's President Yoon Suk-yeol hailed a "new era" of cooperation as they agreed to revive an intelligence-sharing deal that had been scrapped in 2019, and to drop a trade dispute over high-tech materials. The legacy of Japan's 1910-1945 occupation of Korea soured relations between Seoul and Tokyo, reaching a low point in 2018 over Seoul's demand for compensation for victims of Japanese wartime forced labour. But the growing threats from North Korea and China have brought the two US allies closer together.

People

Escape from Putin's Russia

A year ago, the Russian TV editor Marina Ovsyannikova walked in front of the camera during a live news broadcast in Moscow, and held up a banner denouncing the war in Ukraine. She hadn't even told her family she was going to do it: she'd made the poster in secret, while her children were visiting their father. The footage was seen all over the world and Ovsyannikova paid a high price for it: she lost her job, her home and many of her friends. Her mother told her she belonged in jail; her ex-husband declared her unfit to be a parent. "I lost a lot," she told Barbara Davies in the Daily Mail, "but not as much as the Ukrainian people." She spent months under house arrest, but in October she staged an audacious escape and fled to Paris, where President Macron offered her round-the-clock security. She managed to take her 11-year-old daughter with her, but her 17-year-old son, who is still in Russia, says she has ruined their lives and refuses to speak to her. "I hope one day [he] will understand that I did this for him and for his sister," she says, "because I want to believe that Russia has a future as a free country."

A repaired life

Today, Jay Blades is known to millions as the host of the TV show *The Repair Shop*. Last year, he received an MBE for his services to craft, and now he has opened his own restored-furniture shop in Poole. It's been quite a journey since his childhood on an estate in Hackney, says Hugh Graham in The Times. Blades, who has dyslexia, left school with no qualifications; he got tangled up in gang culture; he became homeless and had a mental breakdown. But restoring furniture, he says, helped him to get his life back on track. "Restoring furniture is like restoring yourself," he explains. "If you see a broken, knackered chair and you're able to fix it, put stuff into it, paint it, glue it, screw another leg on it, put some fabric on it, give it that unique twist... Nobody should be put on the scrapheap. We all have a use." Like a worn-out piece of furniture, he adds, "you just need certain things put into you in order to shine".

The "cowardly" crime writer

Donna Leon's detective novels are all set in Venice – a city that was her home for 30 years, says Bryan Appleyard in The Sunday Times. These books sell in their millions all over Europe and beyond, yet the one language Leon (who was born in New Jersey) has not allowed them to be translated into is Italian. "I don't want trouble," she explains. Italians assume that, because the novels are full of murders, they make the country look bad. So it's easier to keep them out of Italian hands, she says. "I'm really a coward. I will do anything to avoid confrontation. I'll lie. I'll cheat. I'll run away. I just can't stand a situation in which people raise their voices and display animosity."

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Not long ago, Donny Osmond was in a limousine being whisked to one of his own shows in Los Angeles when the driver asked him what he was doing in it. Was he a director, a stage manager? The road they were on was lined with posters of his beaming face, so Osmond was thrown. "I said, 'Er, I'm Donny.' The driver stopped the car, turned right round and said: 'You mean you are one of those lookalikes? Because you're not the real Donny Osmond. That guy must be about 90 now.'" Osmond, who is 65, chose to be flattered. "I get it," he told Jenny Johnston in The Mail on Sunday. "It's what happens when you start performing at the age of five. People think you've been around for ever." He became famous in the early 1970s, as one of the famously squeaky clean Mormon brothers who made up The Osmonds; and he was still only 14 when he had his smash solo hit *Puppy Love*. But fashions are fickle; the hits dried up and, when he was 21, he was warned that he was a "has-been". Yet Osmond ploughed on, taking what gigs came his way. At one point during his wilderness years, music industry bosses advised the deeply religious singer that it might be helpful if he got involved in a drugs scandal – and he actually considered it. "But, ultimately, I knew I'd have to explain this to my children one day. I did it the hard way," he says. "By staying true to everything I believe in."

Castaway of the week

This week's edition of Radio 4's Desert Island Discs *featured the actress and activist Liz Carr*

1 *Over the Rainbow* by Harold Arlen and Yip Harburg, performed by Judy Garland
2 *Beautiful Dreamer* by Stephen Foster, performed by Sheryl Crow
3* *Sit Down* by Jim Glennie, Larry Gott, Tim Booth and Gavan Whelan, performed by James
4 *Rollin' Thunder*, written and performed by Ian Stanton
5 *9 to 5*, written and performed by Dolly Parton
6 *Something Good* from *The Sound of Music* by Richard Rodgers, performed by Julie Andrews and Bill Lee
7 *Palliative Claire* (from *Assisted Suicide: The Musical*) by Liz Carr, performed by Claire Willoughby
8 *I Feel Love* by Donna Summer, Giorgio Moroder and Pete Bellotte, performed by Donna Summer

Book: *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Luxury: a pair of ruby slippers

* Choice if allowed only one record

Viewpoint:
Twisted hot cross buns

"I'm cross about hot cross buns. A blamelessly simple seasonal offering bearing multiple messages of joy: Christ is risen; the days are getting longer; winter is over; spring is coming. So why mess with them? On our shelves now are to be found: red velvet hot cross buns; cheese, tomato and oregano hot cross buns; salted-caramel blondie hot cross buns; and West Country mature cheddar and stout hot cross buns. What more do you want? There's precedent for hot cross bun legislation – restrictions on their sale were imposed in the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I. It's time to look at this again and stamp out the twisting, which is verging on heretical."
Adrian Chiles in The Guardian

Farewell

Isabel Colegate, literary agent and author best known for *The Shooting Party*, died 12 March, aged 91.

Patrick French, historian who wrote an explosive biography of V.S. Naipaul in 2008, died 16 March, aged 56.

Jacqueline Gold, entrepreneur and former CEO of Ann Summers, died 16 March, aged 62.

Lance Reddick, American actor, best known for his parts in *The Wire* and the *John Wick* franchise, died 17 March, aged 60.

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The tragedy of the Iraq War

It is 20 years since America and a coalition of British, Australian and Polish forces invaded Saddam Hussein's Iraq

Civilians fleeing Basra in March 2003

Why was Iraq invaded?

"Our mission is clear," declared president George W. Bush following the ground invasion of Iraq on 20 March 2003: "to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction [WMDs], to end Saddam Hussein's support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people". The Bush administration alleged a material breach of UN Security Council Resolution 1441, which in late 2002 had given Iraq "a final opportunity" to disarm (an obligation imposed after its defeat in the first Gulf War in 1991). The official case for war fell apart quickly: no significant WMDs were ever found, and by late 2003, Bush conceded there was no evidence linking Saddam to al-Qa'eda. That has led many to suggest a range of other motives, from spreading democracy to controlling the oil trade, to projecting US power. But the 9/11 attacks were the trigger: accounts suggest Bush made the decision early in 2002.

Did we go to war on a false prospectus?

No, in the sense that in 2003 US and British intelligence genuinely believed Iraq had WMD, as did France and Germany. (Saddam had destroyed his WMD in the 1990s, but was unwilling to reveal this; as the UN weapons inspector Hans Blix put it, he had kept the "beware of the dog" sign, though he'd got rid of the dog.) But yes, in the sense that the intelligence was deeply flawed – in many cases second- or third-hand, or fabricated by regime opponents living in exile – and was presented without the necessary qualifications. In September 2002, PM Tony Blair published a dossier that, he said, "established beyond doubt" that Iraq had continued to produce chemical and biological weapons, and could deploy them within 45 minutes. In 2016, the Iraq Inquiry chaired by John Chilcot found that Blair's certainty on this point was not justified, and that British intelligence ought to have corrected him.

How was the decision to invade made?

A timetable was set early on: the US wanted to invade in spring 2003, before the summer heat. Everything else – intelligence, legal arguments, diplomacy – ultimately cleaved to that. The "Downing Street Memo" of July 2002 quoted Sir Richard Dearlove, head of MI6, just back from Washington, saying that war had become "inevitable": "Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy." The Chilcot inquiry found the decision was made before the peaceful options for disarmament had been exhausted; and Blair had decided to support war early on. "I will be with you, whatever," he told Bush in July 2002.

Is this a case of 20/20 hindsight?

To an extent: few admit to backing the war today, although at the time 49 nations supported it, along with (according to YouGov) 54% of the UK public, and most of the British press. There were, though, plenty of dissenters. More than 750,000 people joined the Stop the War rally in London on 15 February 2003. On 18 March 2003, 139 Labour MPs, along with every Liberal Democrat and a few rebel Tories, voted for an amendment that said that "the case for war against Iraq has not yet been established". For the same reason, France and Germany opposed the invasion; the Arab League issued a statement warning that it would "open the gates of hell".

Why did things go wrong?

The US did not have a clear postwar plan. A meticulously planned military operation – leading to total conquest by 1 May, incurring about 150 casualties – was followed by a totally incompetent occupation. Iraqi euphoria at Saddam's removal gave way to looting ("Stuff happens," said US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld. "Freedom's untidy."). UK postwar planning was also "wholly inadequate", found Chilcot, who identified key failings, such as the policy of total "de-Ba'athification" (the removal of all officials from Saddam's ruling party) and the dissolution of Iraq's security services. "But the big mistake, the original sin," says Prof Toby Dodge of the LSE, "was to invade a country you know nothing about with a bunch of exiles that had not been there for 20 years. It was destined for failure. Full stop."

Why did Iraq descend into chaos?

The insurgency against US and coalition troops began in 2003, led by Ba'athists and Sunnis whose long ascendancy over Iraq's Shia majority had been ended. It was galvanised by civilian deaths and reports of US abuses – notably the torture of suspects in Abu Ghraib prison, revealed in early 2004. Simultaneously, Shia militia groups fought against both Sunnis and the occupation. In 2006, full-scale sectarian war erupted with the bombing of a Shia shrine in the city of Samarra by Sunni extremists. Brutal reprisals by Shia militants and "death squads" against Sunni civilians followed, feeding a cycle of violence. The situation was stabilised in 2007 by the US troop "surge", supported by Sunni moderates. But Iraq was plunged into civil war again by Islamic State, whose leaders met in a US prison camp, and which proclaimed a caliphate across much of Iraq and Syria in 2014.

What were the long-term results?

Iraq, today, is relatively calm and is a democracy of sorts; but the rule of law is weak, militias still play a big role, and it is one of the most corrupt states on Earth. Against the limited gains must be set the carnage: casualties are hard to estimate, but Iraq Body Count recorded some 200,000 civilian deaths up to 2019. There were also 4,491 US and 179 UK military deaths. Geopolitically, the war was a disaster: it poisoned America's image in the Middle East, distracted it from the war in Afghanistan against the Taliban, undermined the case for democracy, and strengthened Iran and its proxies. It also undermined one of the most basic elements of international law: that states should not invade other states. As Vladimir Putin's apologists so often say: what about Iraq?

The neocons and the new world order

Neoconservatism emerged among US liberals disenchanted with the 1960s Left. Its hallmarks were a strong belief in free markets and individual freedoms, along with the advocacy of military power abroad to promote US interests and democracy. Many senior defence officials in the Bush administration, such as Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle and Paul Bremer, were vocal neocons and early advocates of the Iraq invasion. Bush's powerful vice-president, Dick Cheney, and defence secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, were not avowed neocons, but supported their ideas. In June 2002, President Bush outlined a set of foreign policy principles known as "the Bush doctrine": the US would act pre-emptively against its enemies; it would aim to export democracy around the world; and it would maintain clear global military supremacy.

Such ideas weren't limited to the neocons. The wave of democratisation in the 1990s had raised hopes of a new world order. It was also the high point for proponents of humanitarian military intervention – inspired by effective and relatively painless operations in Bosnia, Kosovo and Sierra Leone, and by the first Gulf War. In April 1999, Tony Blair gave a speech in Chicago in which he argued for such interventions.

Best articles: Britain

All those small boats lead to the car wash

Bagehot

The Economist

You can tell a lot about a person from their shoes, says Bagehot – especially if they work in a car wash. If they're scrubbing vehicles in soaking trainers, rather than proper boots, it's a dead giveaway they're working for a dodgy business. The country is awash with such black-market jobs. A study last year found that, of the car washes it surveyed, 89% didn't provide any payslips, and only 7% carried out "right to work" checks. Yet rather than tighten the rules, the Government has opted for a totally ineffective code of self-regulation. And car washes are just one of many law-breaking businesses catering to, and exploiting, people who don't have the right to work in Britain. A recent survey found that about half of Nottingham's textile workers didn't receive minimum wages, sick leave or holiday pay. Sweatshops in Leicester, stores selling knockoff American sweets in London – all are havens for illegal labour. The Government is desperately trying to check the flow of irregular migrants crossing the Channel, yet it's ignoring one of the pull factors that brings them here: the ease of making money in Britain's black market. They should crack down on that instead.

Britain is now the sick man of Europe

Fraser Nelson

The Daily Telegraph

Something is going "deeply, profoundly and expensively wrong" in Britain, says Fraser Nelson. Whereas employment rates in every other major country have bounced back to pre-pandemic levels, ours are getting worse. Before the lockdowns, less than 8% of our working-age population was claiming sickness benefit of some sort – the Office for Budget Responsibility expects that to rise to a staggering 12% in a few years. Every day, almost 5,000 people are signing up for it – twice the pre-Covid rate. All this carries a huge price in both human and financial terms; in the past four months, the expected cost of paying people on health-related benefits has risen by £8bn. And the biggest single claimant category is poor mental health. Some 6.5 million of us are on antidepressants, a rise of a million in five years. Mental health is such a delicate subject, MPs have been loath to call attention to the fact that "we're now keeping five million people on dole of various kinds". But we have to confront the issue. Without urgent action to redress this malaise, our economy will "sink into a sea of sick notes".

Do you speak English? Shame on you

Andrew Neil

Daily Mail

Remember the days when Oxfam's mission was famine relief? They're long gone, says Andrew Neil. Today the charity's main concern seems to be expounding "left-wing agitprop". Look at the 92-page "Inclusive Language Guide" it issued last week: it reads like a parody of wokery. Staff should avoid the words "mother" and "father", it admonishes: they ascribe "gendered roles". Other terms to be deplored include headquarters (implies a "colonial" power dynamic), field trips ("reinforces colonial attitudes") and aid sector ("cements" idea of those with "resources" giving "charitable" aid). The guide even apologises for the English language, it being "the language of a colonising nation". It's easy to scoff at this stuff, but it's not a fad; it's a "cultural sea change" seeded on university campuses and now infiltrating newsrooms, boardrooms and public agencies. What masquerades as sensitivity is actually a drive to close down debate and grant protected status to the views of "culture warriors" on gender, race and other matters. We need to recognise the power drive behind such holier-than-thou injunctions and refuse ever to be cowed by them.

Why all our care workers deserve a badge

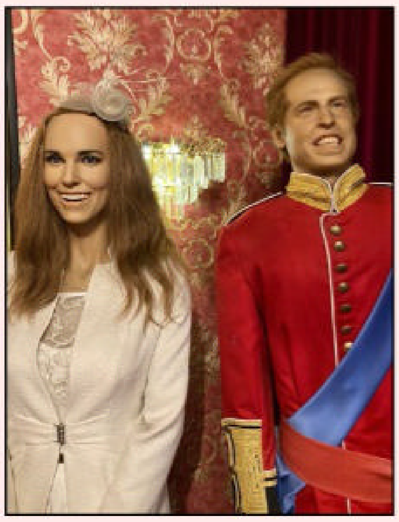
Francis Elliott

The Times

Politics is a complex, intractable business, says Francis Elliott. Yet every now and again, informed debate gives rise to a simple, and glaringly sensible, proposal. One such emerged recently from an ideas session on the topic of social care arranged by the charity Engage Britain. The idea? To give care workers a green badge, similar to the blue badge for disabled drivers, that would exempt them from residential parking charges while on duty. This really is a no-brainer. Care workers have a hard enough job already, rushing between home visits, without having to hunt for a place to park and worry about receiving parking tickets. Doing so cuts into their visiting times and means many end up working beyond their salaried hours, despite often being paid little more than the minimum wage. A green parking badge wouldn't fix all the problems afflicting the social care sector, which is desperately short of staff and needs much wider reforms. But it would make care workers' jobs that much easier and provide them with "an outward show of society's estimation". What are we waiting for?

IT MUST BE TRUE...
I read it in the tabloids

A scaffolder from Devon says he has "no regrets" after having the QR code from his Tesco Clubcard tattooed onto his wrist. Dean Mayhew, 31, has collected £18 worth of points since he got the tattoo last July. "I love the tattoo so much," he said. "Sometimes when I go in there, the cashier doesn't believe it's real – I have to tell them 'just scan it please!'" He is now considering getting a tattoo of his Nectar card, for when he goes to Sainsbury's.



A waxworks museum in Poland has been mocked for its botched models of the Prince and Princess of Wales. Footage of the figures, which went viral on TikTok, led viewers to wonder why Kate looked so "dishevelled" and had such a large forehead, and why Prince William looked like "Hugh Grant after 20 Jägerbombs".

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A council mistakenly sent a letter to a widower about his own death. South Norfolk Council told Stuart Dobson, 77, it was "sorry to hear" he had died, and informed him about a tax exemption he could apply for. Dobson received the letter weeks after he had been widowed, and says he went to see the council to ask: "Do I look dead to you?" The council has apologised for the error.

A former social worker is reportedly making £1,000 a day by impersonating the TV presenter and columnist Adrian Chiles on the adult site OnlyFans. The man, identified as "Mike", told the Sunday Sport that customers pay him to "strip while reading out the weekend's football scores", and to eat buttered crumpets in the nude "while spouting inane drivel in a West Midlands accent".

The Republicans: are they going soft on Ukraine?

Presidential hopeful DeSantis: aping Donald Trump

How far the Republican Party has fallen, said David French in The New York Times. Forty years ago this month, Ronald Reagan stood up for Western values in the face of "an expansionist, aggressive Soviet Union" by giving what became known as his "evil empire speech". What a contrast between his "moral clarity" and Ron DeSantis's craven statement last week about Ukraine. The Florida governor and presidential hopeful warned that "becoming further entangled" in the conflict was not in America's "vital interests". He described the war as a "territorial dispute", which, as has been pointed out, is like characterising a bank robbery as a "financial dispute". As usual, DeSantis was just aping Donald Trump, who has also criticised America's support for Ukraine, claiming, absurdly, that he could end the war within 24 hours.

DeSantis is right about Ukraine, said Kurt Schlichter on Townhall. He served in Iraq and knows what an unwinnable war looks like. It's an "indisputable truth" that Ukraine is not of critical importance, and that the US should not be drawn into an escalating war with Russia. As a retired army colonel who once trained Ukrainian soldiers in their country, I have every sympathy with their cause, but it's their fight, not ours. We can't expend "endless treasure and maybe even blood". The collision last week between a US drone and a Russian jet illustrates the risks of escalation. And whatever the hawks in Washington think, DeSantis is in line with many Republican voters, said Michael Brendan Dougherty in National Review. According to one recent poll, 47% of Republicans say we are doing too much to help Ukraine. Only 19% of them would like to do more.

Still, much of DeSantis's argument was "flat-out wrong", said Dalibor Rohac in the New York Post. He warned that sending US troops there or pursuing "regime change" in Russia would be dangerous; nobody in power has suggested that. His Ukraine stance is "terrible foreign policy", said Henry Olsen in The Washington Post. DeSantis says the real threat to the US today comes from China, but Europe is a crucial ally in that struggle. So abandoning Europe in its battle with Russia won't help. His position is terrible politics, too. To win the nomination, he'll need to win over a majority of Republicans, not just Trump's base. His Ukraine policy will have alienated that group; it is a serious "blunder".

A disastrous plan to drill in the Arctic

Elizabeth Kolbert

The New Yorker

Are you confused by Joe Biden's climate change policies? You should be, says Elizabeth Kolbert. On the one hand, the president has promised billions of dollars' worth of tax credits to speed the transition away from fossil fuels, as part of his Inflation Reduction Act. On the other hand, that legislation also opens the way for millions of acres of federal land to be auctioned off for oil and gas drilling. In February 2020, as a presidential candidate, Biden insisted there should be "no more drilling on federal lands, period. Period, period, period," adding that to drill for oil in the Arctic would be a "big disaster". Yet he has just approved an immense new drilling operation – the Willow Project – in the Arctic. The scheme is expected to involve about 200 wells. A telling detail: ConocoPhillips, the energy company awarded the project, plans to install chillers to keep the permafrost frozen and its equipment steady as temperatures rise. This scheme is completely at odds with Biden's green policies, but he has nevertheless decided to go ahead with it, for political reasons. It's a familiar story that explains why the battle against global warming never seems to get anywhere. "A massive oil project that requires chilling the permafrost is, unfortunately, the perfect metaphor for our time."

The new front in the war on drugs?

Fiona Harrigan

Reason

Diplomatic tensions are rising between the US and Mexico, says Fiona Harrigan. Spiralling fentanyl overdose deaths in the US are fuelling anger about cross-border smuggling, and a recent kidnapping incident that left two Americans dead in northern Mexico has aggravated the situation. So, too, have the growing calls from US Republicans for missile strikes or other forms of military action against cartels south of the border. "We've done this before," said one Mexico hawk, Florida congressman Mike Waltz, citing the military aid the US has provided to Colombia to combat its drug cartels. "Plan Colombia" is hardly an encouraging precedent. It cost the US roughly $12bn between 2000 and 2021, and the counter-narcotics element of the operation has proved a complete bust. In 2019, Colombia had more hectares cultivated with coca leaf (212,000) than two decades earlier (160,000). The $9bn the US spent trying to stamp out Afghanistan's opium and heroin production yielded similarly bad results. Overdose deaths in the US are a huge problem, but it's one best tackled through harm-reduction strategies. We won't solve it by "fighting the war on drugs just a little bit harder" – and certainly not by "bombing a neighbouring country against its wishes".

Our capital is no longer fit for purpose

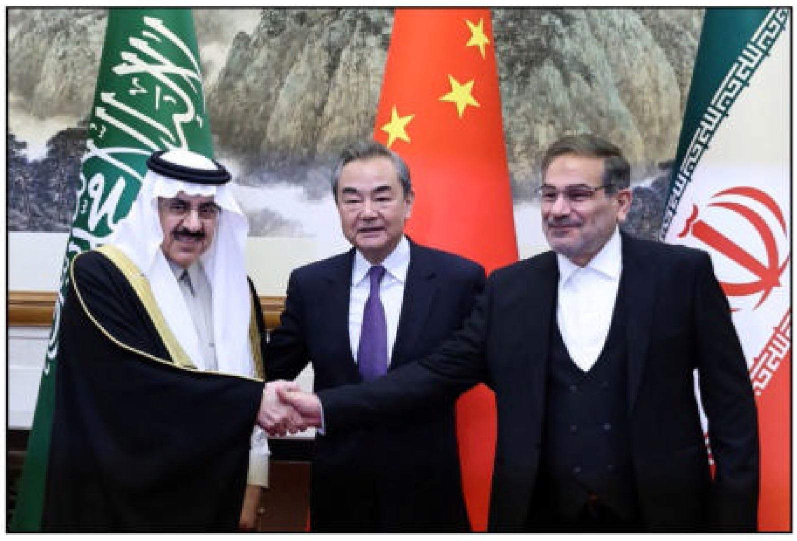
James Piereson

Newsweek

It's time to "think the unthinkable" and move America's capital, says James Piereson. Washington DC is no longer fit for purpose. Its crime problem is bad enough, but what makes things worse is the region's intolerable level of "partisan bias". In the past five presidential elections, an average of 91% of the vote in the city has gone to Democratic candidates. When public officials are accused of crimes, they face juries picked from pools composed entirely of Democrats. Local networks of liberal officials, campaigners and journalists conspire to push their own agendas, through well-timed leaks and press "investigations". Both geographically and politically, the city is "remote from the people it is supposed to serve". New York and Philadelphia have previously served as the US capital, and there's nothing to stop us moving it again. The constitution specifies merely that congress should have exclusive jurisdiction over an area not exceeding ten square miles. Why not build a new capital city in a more central location such as the "four corners" region, where the states of New Mexico, Colorado, Utah and Arizona meet? Brazil did something like that in 1960 when it created Brasília. "America could use a fresh start." What better way to begin than to move its capital.

Best articles: International

The kiss-and-make-up deal in the Middle East



Wang Yi with diplomats: an unexpected go-between

"Finally, there is a peace deal of sorts in the Middle East," said Peter Baker in The New York Times. It's not between Israel and Palestine, however; it's between Saudi Arabia and Iran. They have been "at each other's throats for decades". Things came to a head in 2016, when Saudi Arabia executed the dissident Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr: that set off a wave of riots in Iran during which Saudi diplomatic missions were ransacked. Riyadh severed ties with Tehran as a result, and ever since the two have traded insults and engaged in proxy wars. In 2018, Saudi's crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, even went as far as to say that Iran's supreme leader "makes Hitler look good". Yet on 10 March, in a development that has "left heads spinning in capitals around the globe", they reached a surprise rapprochement. Under a deal brokered by China, the two countries will reopen their respective embassies within two months, and activate a security cooperation pact signed in 2001. It's a huge moment, said Francesco Sisci in the Asia Times (Hong Kong), and could have a transformative impact on the Middle East. "A victory for peace," is how China's top diplomat, Wang Yi, characterised it.

The roots of Saudi-Iranian tensions date back to 1979, when Riyadh declined to back the mullahs' drive to set up an Islamic Republic, said Al-Araby (Lusail). In the ensuing years, tensions have sporadically flared, notably over Riyadh's support for Iraq in its war with Iran and, more recently, over Tehran's support of Houthi rebels vying to overthrow Yemen's government. They also backed opposing sides in Syria. But truth be told, both Saudis and Iranians had an interest in reconciliation, said The Economist. Riyadh has been desperate to extract itself from the eight-year war in Yemen: for all the exertions of its forces, much of the country remains in the hands of the Houthi rebels. This deal could presage a separate agreement and offer "a face-saving exit" from Yemen. For its part, Tehran hopes the deal could help restore its tarnished reputation abroad, said The National (Abu Dhabi). Last year's mass protests badly damaged the standing of a regime already viewed as a global "pariah". With this new agreement, Tehran is hoping to show that it's ready to start "mending relations" with the international community.

Its real significance, however, lies in the fact that it was brokered by China, said Jonathan Guyer on Vox (New York). Beijing has shied away from a global peacekeeping role in the past; it has now decided to step in and fill a diplomatic vacuum in the Middle East, where "US influence has been eroding for decades". China's gambit exposes the "self-imposed handicaps that have crippled US Middle East policy", said Stephen M. Walt in Foreign Policy (Washington). Washington maintains "special relationships" with a handful of countries – Israel and the Saudis at the top of the list – but it has "no relationship at all" with others, Iran least of all. China, by contrast, has diplomatic relations and does business with all. That gives it great leverage and prompts a hitherto neglected question in "the emerging Sino-American rivalry": is Beijing now seen as the best guide to a future world order?

Don't bet on it, said Bobby Ghosh in Bloomberg (New York), not on the basis of this deal at any rate. China's role as mediator has been wildly "overstated". The Saudis and Iranians, with Iraq and Oman acting as intermediaries, had been "working towards a détente" for two years. Beijing only entered the picture late on. But it suits Riyadh and Tehran to let Beijing "hog the credit", as China is the biggest buyer of what they have to sell: oil. And the substance of the deal has been overstated, too. The presence of ambassadors in Tehran and Riyadh "did little to ameliorate antagonism in the past"; there's no reason to think it will now. For the deal to have any real substance it would have had to be accompanied by a pledge by Iran to "call off their surrogates in Yemen". None has been forthcoming. This deal does nothing to diminish the risk of a Saudi-Iranian conflict. "But it does give China ownership of a problem nobody else wants. Good luck with that."

FRANCE

A political class brought low by pension reform

Le Figaro
(Paris)

President Macron has forced through his pension reforms – but at what cost, asks Guillaume Tabard. He and his PM, Élisabeth Borne, failed to win the backing of the French parliament to raise the retirement age by two years, to 64; so they used a constitutional tool to ram the plan through with no vote last week. That infuriated opposition MPs, and has sparked angry protests. What a "fiasco". Macron's assertion that our pension system needs reform is right; but the way he pursued his plan was incredibly "clumsy". Ministers' communications were hopelessly "vague" and they made tactical "blunders", offering big concessions early on (they had wanted to raise the retirement age to 65), while failing to win commitments from unions in return. Opposition parties didn't cover themselves in glory either. Left-wingers threw up endless obstacles to the plan; and even right-wing Republicans abandoned all pretence of fiscal discipline to oppose it. This "distressing spectacle" will surely weaken Macron for the rest of his term – but, in truth, no one in the political class has been left "unscathed".

POLAND

The Right can ride the pope's horse to victory

Gazeta Wyborcza
(Warsaw)

Just when they seemed to be losing steam, Poland's ruling right-wing populists – the Law and Justice party (PiS) – have been handed a gift ahead of this year's elections, says Magdalena Sroda. Their attacks on the LGBT+ community were starting to pall; they can no longer afford to dish out more of the pension or welfare handouts they've used to lure voters ever since winning power in 2015. So they badly needed a new cause with "myth-making appeal". And right on cue, a controversy has come to their aid. It concerns claims, broadcast in a documentary by a US-owned TV company, that Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, later Pope John Paul II, protected priests accused of sexually molesting children in his home city of Kraków. Wojtyła, who died in 2005, is revered in Poland and the claims have enraged Catholics and conservatives. So stand by and watch the PiS exploit the backlash: expect to find new monuments to John Paul springing up everywhere; expect to have to listen to repeats of his homilies from morning to night. What makes all this especially painful for secular liberals is that it might well work. People always prefer "mythical heroes" to "myth busters". This "papal propaganda horse" might well propel the PiS, already ahead in the polls, to re-election.

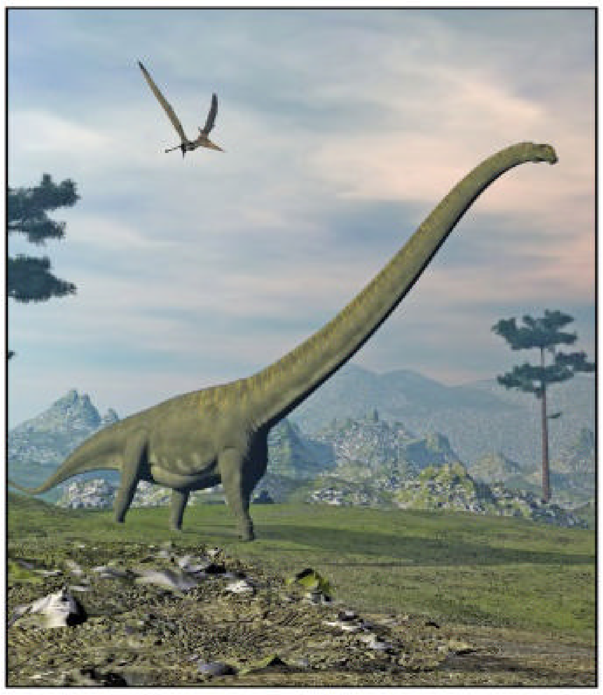
What the scientists are saying…

Apes whirl around to get "high"

Gorillas spin themselves around in circles, because they enjoy feeling dizzy, a study has found. Psychologists at the University of Warwick and University of Birmingham became intrigued by a viral video of an ape spinning around in a pool, and decided to investigate further. It turned out that the behaviour is relatively common: they found numerous videos of apes using ropes or vines to rotate at speeds similar to that of human circus performers. The behaviour is clearly deliberate, and since there is a long history of humans spinning around to achieve an altered mental state, it's likely that apes do it for the same reason, team leader Dr Adriano Lameira told The Daily Telegraph. Potentially, our prehistoric ancestors also span around to get "high", he added. If it's not the original high, then it is "at least one of the oldest that predate substance-induced highs".

A diet to lower dementia risk

Eating a Mediterranean diet – rich in whole grains, nuts, fish, vegetables and fruit – can substantially reduce the risk of dementia, researchers have found. Their findings, published in the journal BMC Medicine, are based on analysis of data on more than 60,000 people from the UK Biobank (most of whom were of European ancestry), who had completed a survey about their eating habits. The researchers scored individuals according to how closely they followed a Mediterranean diet, and noted their genetic risk for dementia. Over the course of nearly a decade, there were 882 cases of dementia, but those who followed a strict Mediterranean diet had a 23% lower risk of developing the condition than those who did not, and this did not seem to be affected by their genetic risk. The researchers, from Newcastle University, conclude that advice to eat a healthy, largely plant-based diet could be incorporated into future strategies for preventing dementia. However, other experts pointed out that it is quite likely that people who eat healthily have a more healthy lifestyle overall, making the impact of their diet hard to assess.



Mamenchisaurus: could graze standing still

Monkeys produce "ancient tools"

Monkeys in southern Thailand have been observed creating shards of rock that could easily be mistaken for prehistoric tools. The long-tailed macaques produced the shards while using rocks to smash palm oil nuts, raising the possibility that some of the flakes found at sites in Africa, and presumed to have been created deliberately by early hominins, could also have been made unwittingly. Dr Tomos Proffitt and his colleagues identified some 200 stone flakes at 40 locations where macaques crack nuts, and compared them with stone tools dated to between 1.5 million and three million years ago. They found that the monkey's shards looked remarkably similar to the ancient ones; however, some of the latter did show signs of having been used for cutting. The team suggest that early hominins used rocks to smash nuts or bones, and at some point, they started picking up the flakes they'd inadvertently created, and found a use for them. They also call for archaeologists to take more care in distinguishing between ancient shards that were created deliberately, and those that were mere byproducts.

The beast with the longest neck

A dinosaur that lived in east Asia 162 million years ago may have had the longest neck of any animal ever known. New analysis of bones uncovered in northwest China in 1987 suggests that the 70-tonne herbivore *Mamenchisaurus sinocanadorum* had a neck that extended 15 metres – one-and-a-half times as long as a bus. That would give it a snout to tail length of 50 metres. It "might be the longest-necked sauropod discovered so far, but odds are that there were larger, longer sauropods roaming around the Late Jurassic of what is now China", said Andrew Moore, a palaeontologist at Stony Brook University in New York. "Unless we're willing to believe that we just so happened to discover the largest individual sauropod that ever existed, our default assumption should always be that there were larger animals out there." The sauropod's neck is one of the features that enabled it to grow so huge: standing in one spot, it could graze extensively without expending any energy. The new analysis has also solved the mystery of how these beasts avoided collapsing under their own weight: it turns out their vertebrae were largely hollow.

The orca seen caring for a sick calf

Sædís and her "calf": adopted or abducted?

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Orcas are fearsome apex predators and interactions between them and long-finned pilot whales tend not to be friendly; but in a world first, a female orca (or killer whale) has been observed apparently caring for a vulnerable pilot whale calf. The pair were seen swimming off the coast of Iceland in the "echelon" ("mother and calf") formation, with the emaciated newborn tucked behind the orca's pectoral fin. In this spot, the calf will have been carried along by the pressure wave created by the adult's body, enabling it to conserve its own energy.

The female, Sædís, has not had any offspring of her own in the ten years that scientists from the University of Iceland have been monitoring her and her pod; she could have had a miscarriage, or lost a newborn, and adopted the pilot whale as a result. However, the researchers say that it would be going too far to hail this as an unprecedented case of cross-parenting. It could be that the calf had positioned itself next to the orca, and that Sædís was merely tolerating its presence; another possibility is that rather than adopting the calf, she had actually abducted it from its pod.

Cold remedies withdrawn

Several cold and cough remedies have been withdrawn from the shelves owing to the risk they pose to people who are having major surgery. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency said that it was acting in the light of evidence that taking pholcodine – an opioid cough suppressant – in the year before an operation, slightly increases the risk of anaphylaxis while under general anaesthetic. Pharmacists were told to stop supplying drugs that contain pholcodine, which include some Day Nurse and Night Nurse capsules, and Boots' own-brand cough syrup, immediately. However, officials stressed that the risk of anaphylaxis (also known as anaphylactic shock) during surgery remained very small. Anyone who is scheduled to have surgery, and who has taken cough medicines in the past 12 months, is advised to inform their anaesthetist.

Pick of the week's Gossip

The Irish taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, blotted his copybook on a trip to Washington last week by making light of Bill Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky. Talking to a new class of Capitol Hill interns about his own experiences as an intern in Washington during Clinton's second term, Varadkar noted that this was a time "when some parents would have had cause for concern about what would happen to interns in Washington". His spokesperson later admitted that the remark had been "ill-judged".

Rupert Murdoch is to marry for the fifth time, less than a year after his divorce from Jerry Hall. "I dreaded falling in love," the 92-year-old billionaire told the New York Post, "but I knew this would be my last. It better be." His fiancée is Ann Lesley Smith, 66, a journalist and former police chaplain who was widowed in 2008. She described their relationship as a "gift from God", and revealed that the pair "speak the same language" and "share the same beliefs". They plan to marry this summer. "We're both looking forward to spending the second half of our lives together," said Murdoch.

The TV presenter Fiona Bruce has long shown grace under fire, says The Times. While in labour with her daughter, she agreed to let a group of medical students observe the birth. With her legs up in stirrups and the baby's head "literally crowning", one of them seized the chance to say: "You are my favourite television presenter." "That's very nice to hear, thank you very much," Bruce replied.

The SNP: on the verge of collapse?

Sturgeon and Murrell: "vice-like grip"

For years, the SNP was "admired, feared and envied" for its iron discipline, said Severin Carrell in The Guardian. But just a few weeks after Nicola Sturgeon's shock resignation, a once "impregnable political edifice" looks close to collapse. Consider the extraordinary events that led to the resignation last week of Peter Murrell, Sturgeon's husband and, for 24 years, the SNP's chief executive. A few weeks ago, the media reported that the SNP had been haemorrhaging members. The story was rubbished by the party's press office, but when the candidates vying to succeed Sturgeon demanded to know exactly how many people were eligible to vote in the contest – amid concern about possible vote-rigging – the SNP had to admit that it now had around 72,000 members, far below the 104,000 it had been claiming. The SNP's head of communications, Murray Foote, resigned, but in so doing, he implied that he'd been lied to by his own colleagues. A day later, Murrell was advised to resign, to avoid a no-confidence vote.

Murrell and Sturgeon had exerted a "vice-like grip" over their party and the "government machinery", said Tom Harris in The Daily Telegraph. Nothing happened without their say so; and Sturgeon's power of patronage extended well beyond the SNP. Yet none of the scandals that hit her administration – not even the police inquiry into the missing £600,000 that was crowdfunded to fight a second referendum – dented the SNP's capacity for winning elections. Now, however, the Sturgeon hegemony has crumbled, and it's all going to pot.

The SNP has been revealed as "a rabble at war with itself", said Neil Mackay in The Herald (Glasgow). In this leadership contest, we've seen candidates trashing each other and the SNP's entire record; "Stop the Steal-type claims countered by howls of 'Trumpianism!'"; and threats of court intervention. The SNP sells itself as a progressive party, yet one of the three candidates, Kate Forbes, is a social and fiscal conservative. On paper, she looks unelectable, said Stephen Bush in the FT, leaving the race clear for Humza Yousaf to win. Although his ministerial record is ho-hum, he benefits from the support of the party establishment. Or there is Ash Regan, the slightly bolder choice. But this race is hard to call, because the SNP is such an odd beast. It now looks like a conventional party of the centre-left, but it is not, because to support it, you still need to believe in only one thing – an independent Scotland. Beyond that, we don't know much about what members think or want. Next week, we may start to find out.

Free childcare: Hunt's welcome giveaway

"At last a government grasps the nettle," said The Times. "British parents have long faced some of the highest childcare costs in Europe." In England, full-time nursery costs about 65% of the median weekly wage, which for many parents makes it hardly worth working. But precious little has been done to help them, or to "unshackle the economy from this drag on growth". In last week's Budget, Jeremy Hunt made "the comprehensive offer that was so overdue". Free childcare, which is currently provided only for three- and four-year-olds, will be extended to give working parents 30 free hours a week for all children aged between nine months and four years. For a government keen to get people back into employment, and to alleviate the cost-of-living crisis, this was an obvious choice. Affordable childcare "makes it easier for parents, particularly mothers, to return to work, in turn boosting GDP and sparing the state from additional spending on handouts".

This is a welcome move, agreed Claer Barrett in the FT: for many women, a career break to have children often becomes a "career end". But it's all very well announcing free childcare hours; Hunt has a lot of work to do if parents are ever to access them. The 30 new hours are only available during term time, and won't even be provided until September 2025. Even then, Hunt is only pledging £4bn for the policy – about half what it is likely to cost. The sector is already in difficulty. Thousands of nurseries have closed since the pandemic. Pay is low, and finding and retaining staff is hard. Government payments are not enough to cover the costs of the existing scheme: it's "an open secret" that the parents of younger children, who pay fees, end up cross-subsidising those who are getting "free" care.

But is any of this a good idea, asked Michael Deacon in The Daily Telegraph. Working parents like me end up dropping our tiny children at nursery for ten hours per day, when it's not what we want, and may not be good for them. Why can't the Government just cut out the middle man, and subsidise parents who want to look after their children? Aren't we just replacing the family "with a giant national Ponzi scheme": making parents work, so they can pay someone else to raise their children, and thus nudge up the nation's GDP? The point is that childcare needs to be good, said Rachel Sylvester in Prospect. The best systems in the world, such as Finland's, see it "as the vital first steps in education, rather than a babysitting service" – and they invest generously in their staff. In Britain, though, Hunt is relaxing the staff-to-child ratio to make care more affordable. Decent childcare is not something that can be provided on the cheap.

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Climate change: the Earth at a crossroads

Flooding in Pakistan last August

Humanity is at a “climate crossroads”, said Damian Carrington in The Guardian. “What we do in the next few years will determine our fate for millennia.” That’s the message of the landmark report published this week by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which was compiled by the world’s leading climate experts and takes stock of the latest research. The window of opportunity to sustain “a liveable and sustainable future”, the report claims, is “rapidly closing”. Global temperatures are already 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels, and they’re likely to reach 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels in the early 2030s regardless of what we do now. The real question is whether we stabilise the global temperature rise around that threshold or just blast right through it. The former option will require greenhouse gas emissions to peak “at the latest before 2025” and steeply reduce thereafter.

If we exceed 1.5°C of warming, “we won’t like it”, said Eugene Robinson in The Washington Post. The IPCC predicts with “high confidence” that it would lead to “irreversible adverse impacts” on vulnerable ecosystems. Were we to hit 2°C of warming, the effects of increased wildfires, drying of peatlands and permafrost thawing would make it very hard to turn back the temperature rise. It would be “like trying to climb a greased pole”. One consolation is that the IPCC believes green reforms have made the “most dystopian scenarios”, involving 4°C or more of warming, much less likely than once feared. On the other hand, it believes its projections for when adverse impacts would kick in were too conservative. We’re already suffering some of the extreme weather events it thought would occur when we hit 1.5°C of warming.

The good news, said Jack Kessler in the Evening Standard, is that we can still rescue the situation. Renewable technologies are available and rapid progress is possible. “Only 66 years separated the Wright brothers’ first flight and Neil Armstrong setting foot on the Moon.” All that’s missing is the political will. Call me cynical, said Elizabeth Kolbert in The New Yorker, but I can’t see this report spurring urgent action when so many previous ones have failed to. According to a recent study, China approved 106 gigawatts’ worth of new coal-fired power plants in 2022, the equivalent of two large plants a week. The Biden administration has just approved a huge new oil drilling venture in Alaska. “Can actions like this be squared with halving emissions by 2030 and eliminating them by 2050? The simple answer is no.”

NHS strikes: is the end in sight?

PATIENTS
ARE SICK
WE ARE
TIRED
A victory for the strikers?

It’s amazing what “negotiating in good faith” and making a few compromises can achieve, said the Evening Standard. Months of damaging strikes by nurses and paramedics have been put on hold after unions agreed a pay deal for England last week – of a 5% rise from April and a one-off extra payment covering the 2022/3 financial year of at least £1,655. Rishi Sunak said the agreement, being put to union members for approval, was “a fair deal” that would “put disruptive strike action behind us”. Steve Barclay, the Health Secretary, urged junior doctors, who held a three-day strike last week, to show “leadership” and accept the same terms.

Sunak’s allies are trumpeting this breakthrough as another win for his “calm, forensic, pragmatic style of government”, said Andrew Grice in The Independent. But this NHS pay deal is “hardly a triumph”. There have been 140,000 cancelled operations and appointments during a needlessly long dispute that Sunak could have ended months ago. Indeed, Whitehall sources say that Barclay tried to do a deal along the current lines back in January, but that he was blocked by the Treasury and the PM. Sunak thought that public support for the NHS strikers would wane over time. He was wrong – and his “foot-dragging” means that waiting lists are now even longer.

Even so, there are good reasons why a deal has become easier to forge in recent weeks, said Chris Smyth in The Times. Crucially, inflation seems to have peaked: official forecasts suggest it will fall over the course of 2023 from 10.7% to 2.9%. In that context, a 5% pay offer through to April 2024 looks reasonably generous. Meanwhile, the Government has more wiggle room due to an improved economic outlook. In real terms, after inflation, the settlement will leave NHS workers below where they were in 2021-22, said Heather Stewart in The Guardian. And it’s not yet clear where the money’s coming from. Nevertheless, it’s “considerably” more than the Government wanted to agree, and “marks a significant victory” for the strikers. Politically, it’s clear the Sunak Government wants to “draw a line under a miserable winter of industrial strife” and move on. Doctors, teachers and civil servants will be hoping for something similar.

Wit & Wisdom

“The right honourable gentleman has sat on the fence for so long that the iron has entered his soul.”
David Lloyd George, quoted in The Hindu

“Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it.”
Mark Twain, quoted in the Cape Cod Times

“Happiness is not an ideal of reason, but of imagination.”
Immanuel Kant, quoted on Jezebel

“Egotist: a person of low taste – more interested in himself than in me.”
Ambrose Bierce, quoted in City Journal

“Truth is fairest naked.”
Schopenhauer, quoted on The Browser

“In politics, a good rule of thumb is that things get serious when people who aren’t interested in politics start to notice.”
Andrew Marr in The New Statesman

“How heritable is intelligence? Nothing like as heritable as money.”
Geneticist Steve Jones, quoted in the Guardian

“I stopped believing in Santa Claus at the age of six, when my mother took me to see him in a store and he asked for my autograph.”
Shirley Temple, quoted on Yahoo

“Every improvement in communication makes the bore more terrible.”
Frank Moore Colby, quoted in The Knowledge

Statistics of the week

Around 1.6 million schoolchildren in England (22% of the total) were reported as persistently absent in the last school year, meaning they missed 10% of sessions. More than 120,000 children missed half or more of sessions, up from 60,000 in 2018-19.

The Daily Telegraph

5m

Meta

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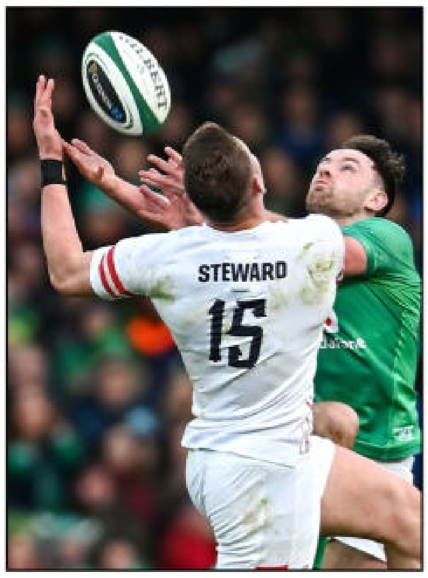
Rugby union: Ireland win their "greatest" Grand Slam

Ireland's final Six Nations match against England – played at the Aviva Stadium last Saturday – was widely expected to be a "procession" for the home team, said Daniel Schofield in The Sunday Telegraph. Ireland had been magnificent all tournament, winning all four of their previous games. England, by contrast, had been so poor, particularly in their "capitulation to France" the previous week – that a "crushing Ireland victory" seemed inevitable. In the event, though Ireland did indeed win, the match was far closer than anyone had predicted, said Robert Kitson in The Observer. With 19 minutes to go, the hosts led just 10-9, and the "ultimate Irish nightmare", an England victory, seemed a real possibility. Although reduced to 14 men just before half-time, England "were proving stubborn opponents". But then came a swift trio of tries that tilted things decisively in the home team's favour. Ireland ran out 29-16 winners to clinch their first ever Grand Slam on home soil.



Steward: harshly treated?

The defining incident of this encounter was the controversial sending off of England full-back Freddie Steward, for "contacting Hugo Keenan's head" with his elbow when the pair collided late in the first half, said Brian Moore in The Daily Telegraph. The red card effectively killed the match as a contest. It seemed a very harsh decision. Steward didn't intentionally run into Keenan and he was "entitled to brace himself for a collision": his elbow only made contact with Keenan's head because there had been "a slight dip from Keenan as he went to gather the bouncing ball". I'm all for rugby taking a stand against head injuries, but a yellow card would have been more appropriate in this case. Maybe so, but I doubt Steward's sending off made any difference to the outcome, said Stephen Jones in The Sunday Times. Yes, England were gutsy in the first half – far better than they'd been against France – but Ireland had just scored a try to take a 10-6 lead, and "there was a sense they were stabilising on their way to winning".

Ireland have been ranked No. 1 for the best part of a year, and their performance at the Six Nations justified that status, said David Walsh in The Sunday Times. This is the fourth time they've won the Grand Slam – they did so previously in 1948, 2009 and 2018 – and it was "by some distance" the greatest of their triumphs, because of the "quality of the rugby played over all five games". The "next challenge" for Andy Farrell's team is to try to win the World Cup in France this autumn, said Robert Kitson in The Guardian. England are the only country ever to have won both the Grand Slam and the World Cup in a single year – they did so in 2003 – but if Ireland "maintain their current momentum", they have an excellent chance of emulating the feat.

Football: a head coach's "extraordinary" attack on his players

Antonio Conte, Tottenham Hotspur's manager, has given some "extraordinary" press conferences of late, said Jason Burt in The Daily Telegraph. After Spurs' exit from the Champions League, he accused the fans of having "no patience". And in a ten-minute rant after last week's 3-3 draw with Southampton, he berated his players for being selfish and not wanting to "play under stress", before pointing out that the team hadn't won a single trophy during chairman Daniel Levy's 22-year tenure (ignoring the League Cup win in 2008). Conte's contract expires at the end of the season, but he appears to "want out now".

Conte: "not a quitter"

It is of course possible that Conte's outburst was designed to summon Levy to the negotiating table to "talk severance", said Matt Barlow in the Daily Mail. An early departure may well suit the Italian, especially on the back of a "stressful and emotional season" that has seen Conte lose three close friends, as well as having emergency gallbladder treatment. However, he is "not usually a quitter". In the past, he has used such "public blasts" as a tactic, as a way of shaking up his players. "He did it last season, after poor performances away at Mura and Burnley." So perhaps the aim of his latest rant was to focus his players' minds before a "final push" for a Champions League place.

I think it's pretty clear Conte recognises his time at Spurs is more or less done, said Martin Samuel in The Times. But that doesn't mean there's no truth to what he says. In recent years, an extraordinary "roll call of managers" has passed through Tottenham – their achievements alone "would command several pages" – but not one has won a "sausage" while at Spurs. That has to say something about the club's culture and executive management: it "cannot be that all the managers are a poor fit".

The tennis player who "can do everything"

Daniil Medvedev stepped out for the Indian Wells final on Sunday as the in-form player on the men's tour, said Tumaini Carayol in The Guardian. With a 19-match winning streak behind him, the Russian would have been oozing confidence. Across the net, however, was Carlos Alcaraz, a "generational talent who at 19 continues to produce greatness seemingly every time he steps on the court". Needing to win to wrench the world No. 1 ranking from Novak Djokovic, Alcaraz demolished Medvedev 6-3, 6-2. It was the Spaniard's first big title since becoming US Open champion last September – and it brought to an end a difficult period in which he has been "hampered by abdominal and hamstring injuries".

Alcaraz: back to world No. 1

Alcaraz's return to No. 1 was helped by the fact that Djokovic was absent at Indian Wells, said Stuart Fraser in The Times. The Serb was denied entry to the US because he remains unvaccinated against Covid-19. But there's no denying the teenager "took his opportunity in style": he won all 12 sets he played in the Californian desert, beating a string of high-ranked opponents. Alcaraz is clearly an "incandescent talent", said Christopher Clarey in The New York Times. "An acrobat in sneakers capable of dominating and mesmerising", he is somewhat reminiscent of Roger Federer – also a "fabulous and feline mover" with a similarly versatile game. As Federer's former coach, Paul Annacone, put it: "He can do everything."

Sporting headlines

Football Fulham's Aleksandar Mitrović potentially faces a lengthy ban after receiving a red card for shoving the referee during his team's 3-1 loss to Manchester United in the FA Cup quarter-finals.

F1 Sergio Pérez won the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, defeating his Red Bull teammate Max Verstappen.

Snooker British player Mark King has been suspended from the World Snooker Tour, in light of suspicious betting patterns following his defeat at the Welsh Open last month. Ten Chinese players have also recently been suspended from the tour.

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LETTERS

Pick of the week's correspondence

Switzerland's solution

To The Times

Why does Switzerland, a country that is in the single market and the Schengen Area, not have a problem with economic immigrants? The answer is that unless you are a citizen or legally recognised resident of Switzerland, you do not have an ID card and you cannot work, rent or receive benefits; and, most importantly, this is enforced.

Dominic Johnson, Le Rouret, France

Labour's pension error

To The Daily Telegraph

Labour would reverse Jeremy Hunt's abolition of the limit on pension savings, except for NHS doctors and consultants. Clearly it believes that public-sector employees are allowed to be well-off in retirement, but private-sector employees (who create the wealth and pay the taxes to provide the inflated public-sector pensions) are not worthy. It beggars belief.

Christine Brown, Richmond, Surrey

The Tories' pension error

To The Times

By abolishing the pension lifetime allowance, and increasing the annual allowance, the Chancellor has certainly encouraged doctors not to retire early – but only by using a very expensive sledgehammer. However, this is not about supporting a hard-pressed NHS, it is really a tax giveaway for tens of thousands of the very highest earners who can now shovel more money into their pensions, with bigger tax breaks. Jeremy Hunt seems to have forgotten that pension tax relief is to encourage people to save enough for a half-decent retirement, not to provide a huge subsidy to high earners. As a matter of fairness, and to encourage pension saving by the lower-paid, we should move to flat-rate tax relief for everyone at, say, 30%, leaving total pension tax relief unchanged.

John Ralfe, pensions consultant, Kirk Ireton, Derbyshire

Exchange of the week

The true cost of the slave trade

To The Guardian

The initiative by the Trevelyan family to pay reparations is laudable and welcome ("British slave owners' family makes public apology in Grenada"). They directly benefitted from slavery, so this is appropriate. I have serious reservations about reparations being paid by me. The Government paying reparations means that my taxes would be used. My ancestors gained nothing from slavery. They worked in the mills and factories of Lancashire, in the most appalling conditions, and were housed in insanitary, dangerous and unhealthy accommodation with a record of disease and deprivation among the worst in Europe. Anyone who doubts this should read Friedrich Engels's 1845 book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. If reparations are to be paid, a tax on the aristocrats and fat cats whose ancestors profited from slavery would be the only just solution.

John Cookson, Bournemouth, Dorset

To The Guardian

"My ancestors gained nothing from slavery," writes John Cookson. Sadly, he is wrong. Everyone in Britain and the rest of the developed world has benefitted from at least 200 years of cheap tobacco, coffee, chocolate and, above all, tea and sugar, produced by slaves or indentured labourers (or, today, low-paid workers) in conditions even worse than those his forebears experienced in the 1840s. In addition, they were probably paid to make clothes out of raw cotton grown by slaves in the southern United States.

The direct responsibility for slavery certainly lies with the slavers and plantation owners, including the British royal family and most of the aristocracy and merchant classes who invested in the hateful trade. But the moral responsibility has to be borne much more widely, and should be in our minds whenever we buy "cheap" goods today.

Prof Sir Roderick Floud, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire

Smartphone scapegoats

To the Financial Times

There is little evidence to back up your recent headline that "Smartphones are hurting children's mental health". Teens' relationship with technology is complicated. Smartphones are used for many activities. While some will cause harm to certain teenagers, some will be beneficial. Reviews and reports reaffirm this stance.

Yet this nuance has been ignored in favour of blaming technologies: generational scapegoats for concerns about the young. In the 1940s, it was addiction to the radio. Focus then moved on to TV and video games. While panics about modern tech continue, we cannot have the necessary pragmatic discussions about how to keep kids safe online.

Dr Amy Orben, psychologist, University of Cambridge; Tom Metherell, PhD student, University College London

Bent bananas: the truth

To The Times

Boris Johnson's appointment with the Privileges Committee this week reminds me of when he applied to be a Conservative candidate in the 1990s and one of the tasks was to make a short speech. He chose as his subject the Brussels commission introducing a regulation on bent bananas. It was received with laughter and applause. As the chief whip in the European Parliament at the time and one of the assessors, I said: "But Mr Johnson, we both know that story is not true, don't we?" His response was bluster and obfuscation. At the third time of pressing, he finally admitted it was not true. Stony silence. I do hope the Privileges Committee will be similarly diligent.

Richard Simmonds, Marlow, Buckinghamshire

A classical crisis

To The Guardian

It is not only at the BBC that live classical music is in crisis. Inevitably, with music societies throughout the country it is predominantly older people who both run and attend provincial concerts. Even a successful society such as our own has seen its membership halved since the pandemic. We are running at a loss and once the money runs out, we will close after more than 70 years. How sad.

Bob Epton, concert secretary, Scunthorpe and North Lincolnshire Concert Society

The junior doctors' plight

To The Times

Junior doctors are not putting their case well to the public. I have just reviewed the tax return for a junior doctor who graduated in 2016 and works full-time for the NHS; she earned £50,307 in the year to 5 April 2022, before tax and significant fees. This is not exciting remuneration six years after graduating.

What is more significant, however, is her unremunerated hours in that year. The culture of unremunerated hours expected from junior doctors would not be tolerated in any other profession. In her case, these hours exceed her annual leave.

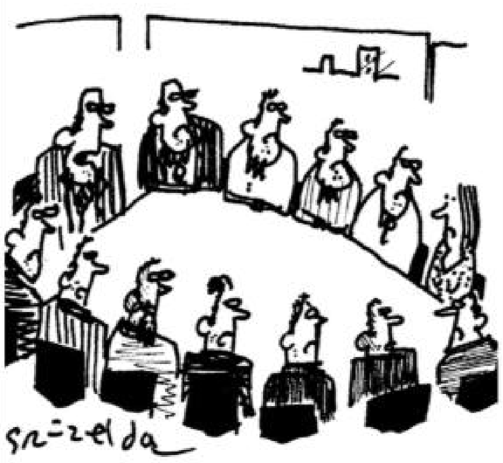
Giles Craven, chartered accountant, London

Swan's way

To the Financial Times

I must disagree with the comment made by the US congressman Brad Sherman about Silicon Valley Bank when he says: "One black swan is a black swan. Two is a flock." The correct name for a group of swans gathered on the ground is "a bank", which seems appropriate.

Jay Cook, Darien, US



"Well, you're the only one who thinks we're a sexist oganisation."

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● Letters have been edited

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Review of reviews: Books

Book of the week

Masquerade: The Lives of Noël Coward

by Oliver Soden

W&N 656pp £30

The Week Bookshop **£23.99 (incl. p&p)**

If Noël Coward had never lived, "nobody would have dared to dream up such varied talents for one man", said Dominic Maxwell in The Times. Born in southwest London in 1899, Coward was an astonishingly prolific playwright, whose best-known work – *Hay Fever*, *Private Lives* – "can still dazzle today". He wrote more than 300 songs, acted in many films (from the wartime drama *In Which We Serve* to *The Italian Job* in 1969), and wrote the screenplay for *Brief Encounter*. "He was also a painter, a novelist and a director." Oliver Soden's *Masquerade* – the first "cradle-to-grave" account of Coward's life for nearly three decades – is an "assiduous, even-handed" and readable portrait of a man who was "hard to ignore and hard to pin down". Although Coward emerges as prickly and contradictory – "a bon vivant, a workhorse, an impresario, a tyrant, a charmer" – Soden concludes that the impulse behind his art was always "generous".

Having grown up a "theatre-obsessed suburban boy", Coward was conscripted in 1918 and spent an "unhappy five months with the Artists Rifles", said Anthony Quinn in The Observer. After the War, he plunged into play-writing and acting, and scored his first big hit in 1924, with *The Vortex*. There followed an "imperial phase", during which he had a string of successes and became famous on both sides of the Atlantic. "By 1929, he was earning an estimated £50,000 a year, or £15m in today's terms." Success, however, helped paper over Coward's "deeply troubled and unfulfilled love life". A gay man with – as Soden notes – a dislike of "same-sex relations lived openly or promiscuously", he was a life-long "fugitive from deep feeling". In his later years, during which he lived as a tax exile in Jamaica and Switzerland, he was "hounded" by "rage and depression".

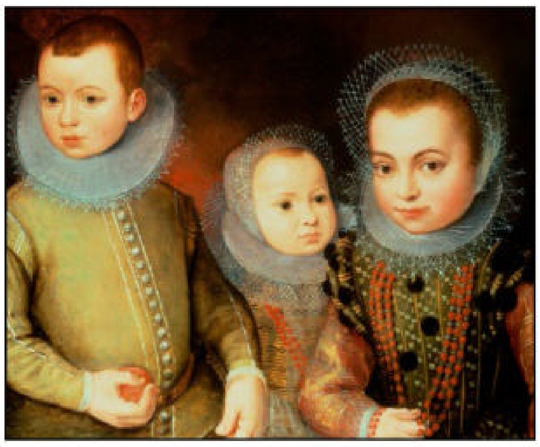
"What a pleasure it is to read a book into which so much labour, and so much affection, have evidently gone," said Nikhil Krishnan in The Daily Telegraph. Soden is the first biographer to describe Coward's "clandestine activities" during the Second World War, including his bumbling attempts at spying for his country. He argues that even Coward's silliest plays show a "deep commitment" to truthfulness and freedom. The challenge for any biographer is to "get through to what the man was really like", said Philip Hensher in The Spectator. "I'm not sure it can be done": Coward was always performing, always "on". Even so, Soden does a "fine" job of capturing an extraordinary figure.

Tudor Children

by Nicholas Orme

Yale University Press 288pp £20

The Week Bookshop **£15.99**



"According to the visual evidence, being a child in Tudor England was a grim business," said Kathryn Hughes in The Sunday Times. "All those portraits of peaky boys and girls in stiff ruffs, clutching prayer books and looking sternly into the mid-distance is hardly suggestive of bubbling joy." Yet in this "elegant and hugely enjoyable book", Nicholas Orme shows that Tudor children were not so different from their modern counterparts: they played endless games, devoured silly stories, and were often "cheeky and inappropriate". The reason Tudor children have been poorly served by historians is that most sources either "say next to nothing about their experiences", or else frame them in terms of what "adults thought they ought to be doing", said Anna Parker in the TLS. The great virtue of Orme's history – the first work about the Tudor period to focus explicitly on childhood – is that it reveals what children "actually did". He analyses bestsellers such as *The Friar and the Boy* – about a boy who can make his "stepmother fart noisily" – and describes such "satisfyingly onomatopoeic" games as "trap-out and truss" and "mumble-the-peg" (the latter required the losing player to pull a "peg out of the muck with his teeth"). The result is "thrilling" and "intensely evocative".

By penetrating the "secret world of Tudor children", Orme's book will educate even those who "think they know the Tudor period inside and out", said Joanne Paul in The Times. It is fascinating to learn about the Bodmin schoolboys who in 1548 devised a war game, one side representing the "old religion", the other the "new". Then as now – Orme points out – children interpreted the "adult world through the prism of play". Taking readers on a "journey both thoroughly foreign and remarkably familiar", this book is "social history at its best".

Novel of the week

Dr. No

by Percival Everett

Influx 276pp £9.99

The Week Bookshop **£7.99**

For four decades, Percival Everett has been the "unsung Jonathan Swift of modern American fiction", churning out a series of "clever, funny and mercilessly satirical" works, said Robert Collins in The Times. His recent success with *The Trees* – a "stupendous novel" about the legacy of slavery, which was shortlisted for last year's Booker Prize – finally brought him to wider attention. Now, he has published *Dr. No*, an "alchemical" spoof of an Ian Fleming novel that "smuggles into its harebrained pages another sly satire of race in America".

The central character, Wala Kitu, is a maths professor at Brown University whose "speciality is the idea of nothing", said Stuart Kelly in The Spectator. His work attracts the attention of a black billionaire called John Sill, who "offers him ludicrous sums of money" to help achieve his goal of becoming a Bond villain. Combining the "zany and the profound" in a novel isn't easy – but Everett manages to blend ruminations on the "notion of nothingness" with a "hijinks plot". He is an "astonishing writer" – and *Dr. No* is another "beautifully choreographed" work.

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Drama & Music

Musical: Guys and Dolls

Bridge Theatre, London SE1 (0333-320 0050). Until 2 September Running time: 2hrs 40mins ★★★★★

World-class singing and dancing in a show that "raises the bar"

© MANUEL HARLAN

With hits ranging from *One Man, Two Guvnors* and *The History Boys* to *Miss Saigon*, it is fair to say that Nicholas Hytner "knows how to put on a show", said David Benedict in Variety. So it was always likely that if he took on "arguably the greatest musical comedy ever written", he'd produce something special. But he's done more than that. His production of Frank Loesser's *Guys and Dolls* is a "solid-gold knockout" that raises the bar – as well as the roof – sky high, and that could happily run forever. His "game-changing" masterstroke (with designer Bunny Christie) is to stage the piece in the round, on a series of platforms that rise and fall in front of a promenade audience, said Andrzej Lukowski in Time Out. There's seating if you prefer. But the buzz from being right beside "world-class singing and dancing" makes this a "transcendent" experience.

It's not just the innovative staging, though, said Nick Curtis in the Evening Standard. Every aspect of this "exhilarating" production is scintillating. The choreography, by Arlene Phillips and James Cousins, is "astonishing". The 14-piece live swing band is "glorious", said Sarah Crompton on What's On Stage. And the performances all feel "fresh-minted" – digging below the "period cliché and the gambling lingo to discover the truth of misplaced loves and longings". Daniel Mays is superb as Nathan Detroit, combining "street smarts" with a wary vulnerability. Marisha Wallace is sensational as his perpetual fiancée, Adelaide. Andrew Richardson, in his professional theatre debut, is "astonishingly charismatic" as the gambler Sky Masterson; and Celinde Schoenmaker, as the Salvation Army sergeant Sarah Brown, sends "shivers down your spine" with the "beauty and glory" of her singing.

Between them, these four sublime performers "mine the twin love affairs on view for all their emotional heft", said Matt Wolf in The New York Times. "They sing splendidly, and break your heart, too." Indeed, the whole of this blissful production turns *Guys and Dolls* into "something as touching as it is tuneful". There is "nothing I could wish more for theatregoers than to experience" it for themselves.

The week's other opening

Village Idiot *Nottingham Playhouse (0115-941 9419) until 25 March, then New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich, and Stratford East*
Samson Hawkins's terrific debut is a "big, happy mainstream comedy" (think *Jerusalem* meets *This Country*) that asks serious questions about identity, nostalgia and modernity; it also has a "very funny love-hate relationship with rural life" (Guardian).

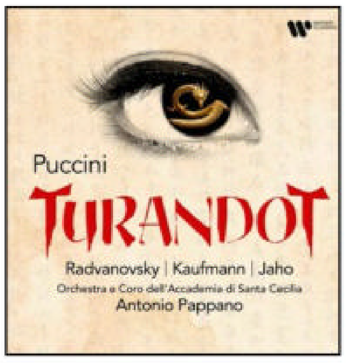
Albums of the week: three new releases

Miley Cyrus: Endless Summer Vacation
RCA
£12

Miley Cyrus has spent years trying to reconcile mainstream chart success with her more leftfield musical instincts, said Alexis Petridis in The Guardian. On this "glorious" eighth album – a "hazily atmospheric" collection that "plays to her provocative strengths" – she has finally got there. *Flowers*, the album's lead single, has already hit No. 1 "everywhere from Poland to Paraguay". The rest of the tracks are similarly "well-written pop songs" with arrangements that "nod in the direction of mid-70s LA without seeming wilfully retro".

The producer (on most of the songs) is Kid Harpoon, the English singer-songwriter who bagged both a Grammy and Brit for Harry Styles's world-conquering *Harry's House*. On Cyrus's album, said Helen Brown in The Independent, Harpoon's "shimmering backdrops lay like perfect, sandy beaches for her to stretch her powerful vocals out across". No longer a "wrecking ball", she "sounds like a woman doing emotional weightlifting". This fine album offers an opportunity to "bask" in her maturing talent.

Puccini: Turandot (cond. Antonio Pappano)
Warner Classics
£25


Puccini
TURANDOT
Radvanovsky | Kaufmann | Jaho
Orchestra e Coro dell'Accademia di Santa Cecilia
Antonio Pappano

Antonio Pappano and Warner Classics haven't rushed their cycle of Puccini's operas, said Richard Fairman in the FT. It's nearly 30 years since their release of *La bohème*. But this starrily cast, studio recording of *Turandot* – with Sondra Radvanovsky and Jonas Kaufmann – has been worth the wait. Radvanovsky "has the big guns vocally for the title role, without the steely edge that can sometimes bedevil it". And Pappano conducts the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia with "blazing colour and an ear for detail".

Kaufmann, too, is on "heroic form", said Erica Jeal in The Guardian. "He has a darker voice with a lower centre of gravity than past Calafs, such as Pavarotti and Björling, but it glows where it needs to, notably in a long-breathed *Nessun Dorma*". Radvanovsky brings "steel in her soprano" and dramatic nuance to the titular princess. Ermonela Jaho is their equal as Liù, producing an "almost impossible sweetness on the high notes". And the "palette of orchestral colour is huge and constantly shifting". What a joy.

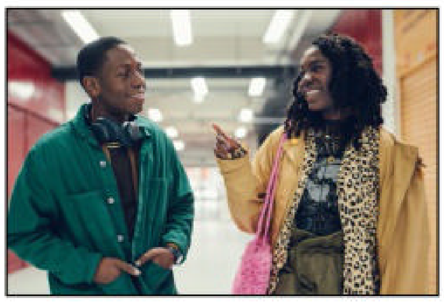
Sleaford Mods: UK Grim
Rough Trade
£11

"Few bands have captured the political despair of the last decade as singularly as Nottingham duo Sleaford Mods," said Elizabeth Aubrey in The Daily Telegraph. *Spare Ribs*, their widely acclaimed album from 2021, was a brutal dissection of the Government's handling of the pandemic. This follow up, *UK Grim*, is another triumph, which "will cement their place as one of Britain's most influential and successful" bands. This time, their focus is on the cost-of-living crisis: it's an album full of political bite, humour and "frequently joyous" takedowns.

There's "rage aplenty" on *UK Grim*, but there is heart, introspection and subtlety too on this "aggy" cruise around 2020s Britain, said Andrew Trendell on NME. "*Apart From You* has a yearning not often associated with Mods." *Smash Each Other Up* is like West Coast hip-hop made in the East Midlands. *Right Wing Beast* is a "ska-pop attack on the powers that be". And *So Trendy* could have been a Gorillaz number, "if it weren't such a delightfully snarky" critique of internet culture.

Stars reflect the overall quality of reviews and our own independent assessment (5 stars=don't miss; 1 star=don't bother)

Film



Rye Lane

1hr 22mins (15)

Charming romcom set in south London

★★★★

The story at the heart of this romcom may not be very original, but it's given "such a modern sheen", and told with "such crackle and wit, that you feel as though you're watching something excitingly novel and new", said Brian Viner in the Daily Mail. Our hero is Dom (David Jonsson), an accountant whose girlfriend has left him for one of his best friends. Sobbing in a gender-neutral toilet cubicle at an art gallery in London, he is overheard by Yas (Vivian Oparah), who has also come to the end of a relationship. Out in the gallery, she recognises him from his shoes, and strikes up a conversation. The pair end up going for a long walk around Peckham and Brixton, and fall for each other along the way. The film has "oodles" of charm and an irresistible "zesty energy"; and the two leads are "splendidly served" by a script that made me laugh out loud "again and again".

With luck, this "glorious" film will launch a new generation of enchanting but slightly more realistic British romcoms, said Robbie Collin in The Daily Telegraph. Unlike, say, *Notting Hill*, which, for all its virtues, depicted a very "Farrow & Ball", very "toffy" and, yes, very white version of Notting Hill, this film really nails "contemporary south London", capturing its "clatter and bustle with such undisguised love, it makes the blossoming of romance there feel like the most natural thing in the world". *Rye Lane* "marks the torch not just being passed, but eagerly seized". I found the film rather lacking in realism, said Peter Bradshaw in The Guardian; and it seemed to me that the script lends it a slightly "kids' TV" feel at times. But it has an "amiable, upbeat energy", an "engagingly unpretentious style", and two very "likeable" performers in the lead roles.

Allelujah

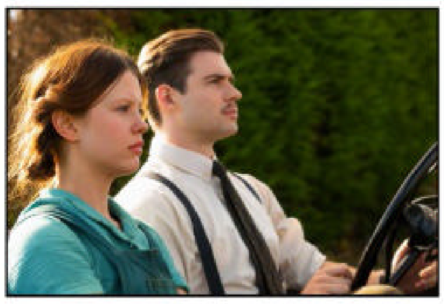
1hr 39mins (12A)

Starry but uneven adaptation of Alan Bennett's play

★★★

Adapted by *Call the Midwife* creator Heidi Thomas, from the 2018 play by Alan Bennett, and starring "a formidable selection of seasoned British acting talent" including Judi Dench, Jennifer Saunders and Derek Jacobi, *Allelujah* "should be a slam dunk of a crowd-pleaser", said Wendy Ide in The Observer. Unfortunately, it's an "uneven" disappointment. The story revolves around "the Beth", a hospital in Yorkshire that specialises in geriatric care and which is under threat of closure by "penny-pinching government officials". The medical staff, led by Saunders's ward sister, "struggle on, undaunted"; but what seems to be building to a "stirring tale of a community standing up against the powers that be takes a darker turn as the story swerves unexpectedly – and rather clumsily – into thriller territory". It all adds up to a tonally "jarring" mish-mash.

I must admit that I was expecting more "humour and warm sentiment", said Matthew Bond in The Mail on Sunday. Still, director Richard Eyre coaxes some "lovely performances" from his cast: Russell Tovey is "quietly splendid" as a "prodigal management consultant", and Bally Gill "impresses" as a caring doctor, even if his character is "too good to be true" ("I've always loved the old," he gushes at one point). If you think of the film "as a love letter to the NHS", and ignore the "melodramatic late twist", you'll enjoy it well enough. *Allelujah* certainly has talent behind it, said Deborah Ross in The Spectator. Not just Bennett and Thomas but a British cast so distinguished, you wonder why Maggie Smith is absent. And yet it is "weirdly lifeless and perfunctory", with precious little humour, and an ending so hideously ill-judged, it made me laugh for all the wrong reasons.



Pearl

1hr 43mins (15)

Horror starring Mia Goth as a deranged farm girl

★★★★

"It takes a very clever performer to make you fall in love with them while playing a psychopathic serial killer," said Dulcie Pearce in The Sun. But that is what Mia Goth has pulled off in this "ferocious, funny and – sometimes – frightening film". She plays Pearl, a dreamy farm girl living in Texas at the end of the First World War with her fearsome mother (Tandi Wright) and her silent father (Matthew Sunderland), who has been paralysed by Spanish flu. Pearl is awaiting her husband's return from the War, while also dreaming of giving up her humdrum life to become a show girl. When an opportunity comes up, she refuses to let "anything or anyone stand in her way" – be it family member, friend, lover or farm animal. The film is a prequel to director Ti West's slasher film *X* (2022), in which Goth played an "elderly murderess"; and while it is unquestionably "mad, bad and sad", it is riveting to watch, and builds to a suitably "palm-sweating" finale.

With her "massive eyes", and primly-tied braids, Goth turns "the girlish enthusiasm up so far that the dial almost breaks", said Leslie Felperin in the Financial Times. But then "she kills a goose with a pitchfork and feeds it to her best friend, a voracious alligator", setting the scene for a treat of a film that is bloody, but also "full of gruesome black comedy and even unexpected moments of poignancy". The trouble is, *Pearl* boils down to a single idea – "Judy Garland goes rogue on a farm", said Kevin Maher in The Times. There is no character development (Pearl is unhinged from the start), and the film ends up seeming a rather "ho-hum horror effort".

Challenge Anneka is back, and it's as heartwarming as ever

Nearly 30 years after *Challenge Anneka* was last on our screens, "Anneka Rice is back", said Anita Singh in The Daily Telegraph. "And frankly, I don't know how we've managed without her" – the woman is a "ray of sunshine". The show was a massive hit at the time, and "wisely, the executives in charge" haven't messed with the format, so we also have "lovely Dave the Soundman returning as Rice's loyal companion".

As before, each episode revolves around Rice carrying out a community project with the help of an army of volunteers. The first episode features an animal rescue centre in Kent, which needs new kennels and a hydrotherapy pool for a disabled pug. Rice is "enthusiastic, warm and generous" throughout; and it all adds up to a radiant revival.

Rice: "saucier with age"

The original show's BBC run ended in 1996, after seven years, yet Rice has "barely changed" since then, said Christopher Stevens in the Daily Mail. She's ditched the jumpsuits, but "if anything, she's got saucier with age". Flirting with an electrical supplier whose warehouse she has just ransacked, she tells him: "Thank you for letting us rummage in your back area." The show "does run a bit long", and there are all sorts of "extraneous bits", said Rebecca Nicholson in The Guardian, but it still makes for heartwarming television. Whether or not you remember the original, there is real joy to be had in watching "hundreds of people pitch in to do a good deed for the community". You may find by the end that you have "a little something" in your eye.

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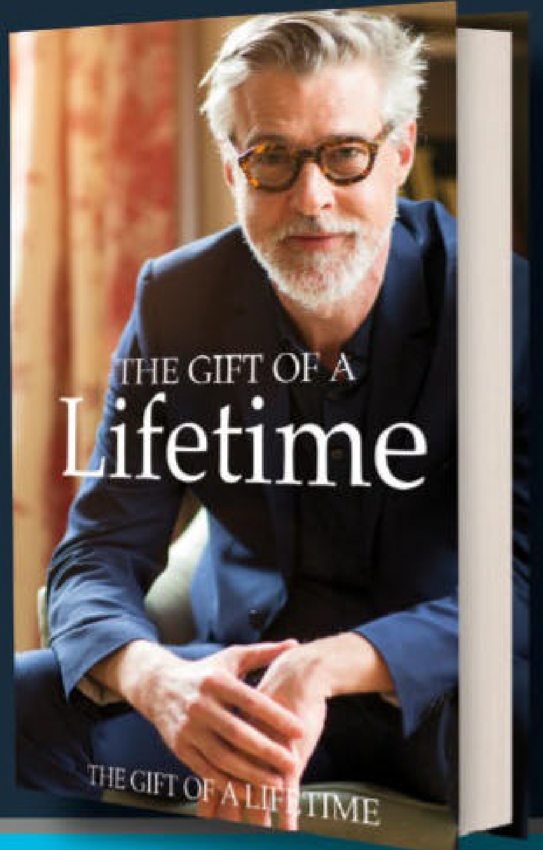
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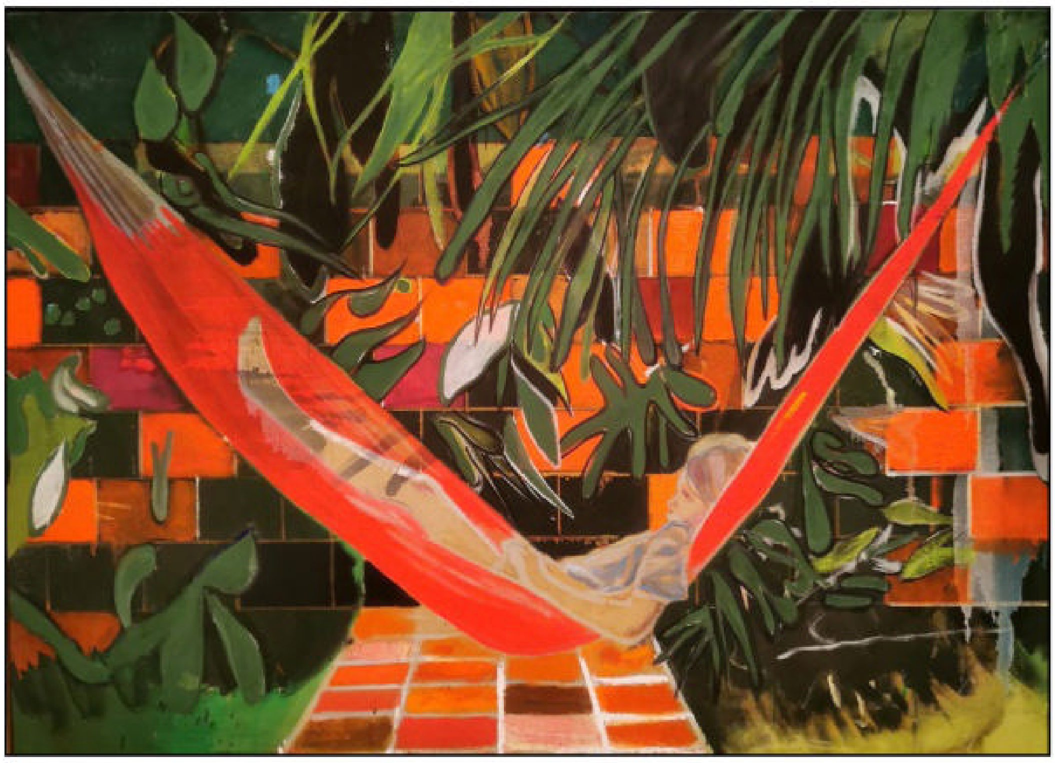
Exhibition of the week **Peter Doig**

The Courtauld Gallery, London WC2 (020-3947 7777, courtauld.ac.uk). Until 29 May



Alice at Boscoe's (2014-23): captures a "mysterious sense" of spirituality

The Scottish artist Peter Doig is arguably "the most influential living painter of his generation", said Mark Hudson in The Independent. His paintings have sold for record sums, and traces of his "enigmatic" style can be detected in the work of countless younger artists. Doig (b.1959) blends dreamlike figuration with elements of abstraction, incorporating both a wealth of art historical allusions and "references and quotes from his own life, photography and popular culture". Having spent two decades living on the island of Trinidad, Doig has now returned to the UK – a homecoming celebrated in this "eagerly awaited" exhibition at The Courtauld Gallery, where he is the first living contemporary artist to be exhibited amongst the Monets, Cézannes and van Goghs that make up the museum's hallowed collection. The show contains just 12 paintings, largely completed after his return to Britain but still hinting at Trinidad: they feature tropical foliage, hallucinatory beach scenes and references to the island's musical culture. It is "an excellent showcase of everything that's impressive, affecting and downright baffling" about this brilliant painter.

The Courtauld is making a bold statement by hanging Doig's "comfortingly figurative" but "testingly elusive" paintings among its masterpieces, said Waldemar Januszczak in The Sunday Times. He almost survives this "big promotion". One particularly impressive painting depicts his teenage daughter "slumped eerily in a glowing red hammock", a work which captures a "mysterious sense" of Romantic spirituality. The "masterpiece" of the show, though, is a scene depicting a mountaineer "at the summit of a huge Alpine vista"; he is "dressed as a harlequined Pierrot" and is quite possibly a self-portrait. Elsewhere, however, Doig is on shakier ground. Works inspired by Trinidad, such as a number of "melancholy beach scenes" and a view of a calypso singer "hurrying along the street in Port of Spain", find him "at his most illustrative and least successful".

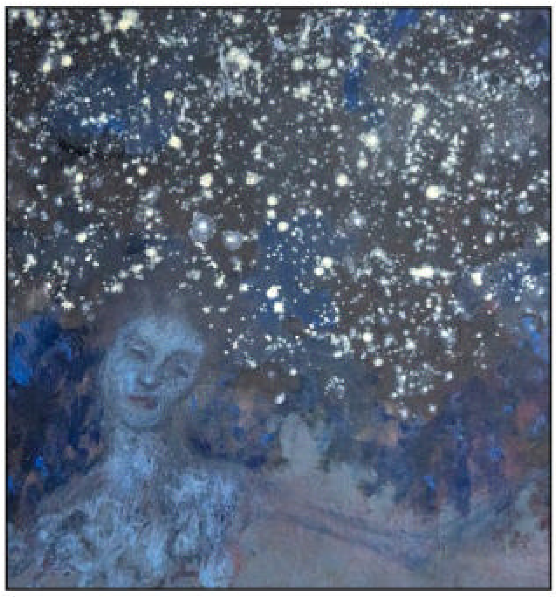
Nevertheless, this is a "superb" show, said Jackie Wullschläger in the FT. A highlight is *Bather*, depicting a "monumental, muscular yet pallid" figure derived from both Cézanne's painting of the same name, and, incongruously, an old photo of the actor Robert Mitchum. More impressive still is a recent picture which sees Doig's son eating eggs by a north London canal, recalling Derain's "dazzling" views of London bridges and Manet's urban landscapes: the child appears vividly "present-tense", but the "murky greenish water" and the ghostly figure passing on a barge belong to a different time altogether. It's "entirely appropriate" to find Doig hanging here in the "impressionist stronghold of the Courtauld". Few of his peers "could hold their own so impressively and fascinatingly in such company".

Where to buy…

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Oliver Bak

at Cassius & Co.

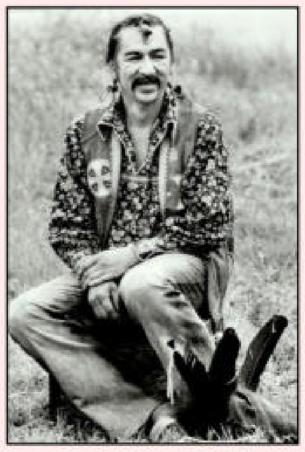


Son of Bone (2023), 61cm x 76cm

Peter Doig is one of several painters who spring to mind when considering the work of Danish artist Oliver Bak (b.1992). Like Doig and other apparent touchstones, including Marc Chagall and Gustav Klimt, Bak creates figurative scenes that bleed into passages of abstraction, often to ethereal effect. *Caves in the Sky*, a show of works inspired by the verse of the late French poet Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, presents a series of paintings and drawings full of heavily symbolic imagery: a black dog prowls in silhouette beneath a woman smoking a cigarette on a balcony; strange lights ring hazily realised figures; a floating shape that recalls the outline of a Matisse Madonna is filled with a humanoid skeleton. The most interesting works here are the most abstract, many of which are reminiscent of the kind of "automatic drawings" produced by Victorian spiritualists: floral shapes contain galactic swirls in glorious pink and orange, while dark passages give way to towering columns of dusty colour. Prices start at £100.

63 Kinnerton Street, London SW1
(020-7235 3354). Until 25 May

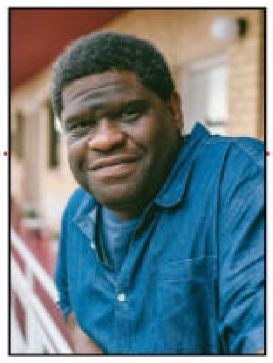
The largest art fraud in history?



The indigenous Canadian artist Norval Morrisseau (pictured) was known in his lifetime as "the Picasso of the North", said Will Pavia in The Times. Morrisseau (1932-2007) founded the Woodlands School, which drew on the history and legends of the indigenous peoples of the Great Lakes area. However, Canadian police now believe that no less than three groups of forgers have produced more than 1,000 paintings under Morrisseau's name "in what is being described as the largest art fraud in history". Eight people have been arrested. Ontario provincial police allege there have been "three distinct groups" of forgers at work, some dating back to the 1990s. Indigenous painters, including the artist's nephew, Benjamin Morrisseau, were recruited to turn out bogus works. Detectives assembled a large number of brightly coloured paintings for the press conference at police headquarters, declaring that "for each one of these you see behind me... there are another hundred seized".

© PETER DOIG. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THE COURTAULD GALLERY

The List



Best books... Gary Younge

The author, broadcaster and journalist chooses his favourite books. His new book, Dispatches from the Diaspora: From Nelson Mandela to Black Lives Matter, *is out now (Faber £14.99)*

Brown Girl, Brownstones by Paule Marshall, 1959 (Dover £10.99). This coming-of-age story, set in Brooklyn, about a young woman and her fractious Barbadian family is vivid, heartbreaking but also full of hope: a migrant story that lays bare both human frailty and potential. Reading it was the first time I saw elements of my life in literature.

The Black Jacobins by C.L.R. James, 1938 (Penguin £12.99). In this masterclass in historical writing, Trinidadian intellectual and activist James tells the story of the Haitian revolution, the world's only successful slave rebellion that sought to apply the principles of the French Revolution to once enslaved people – an aspiration that remains unfulfilled to this day.

The Color Purple by Alice Walker, 1982 (Orion £9.99). Through a series of letters, Alice Walker turns the tragic story of Celie, an African-American woman in the Deep South, into a tale of resistance, sensuality and triumph. This book not only sparked my interest in feminism but in the civil rights movement and America's southern culture too.

What is History? by E.H. Carr, 1961 (Penguin £10.99). Discovering this book blew my mind. In a series of essays, drawn from his 1961 Trevelyan Lectures in Cambridge, Carr interrogates the role of the historian and their use of "facts". Intellectually rigorous and deeply knowledgeable, he draws conclusions that are as relevant for journalists as they are for academics.

Shah of Shahs by Ryszard Kapuscinski, 1982 (Penguin £9.99). Kapuscinski, a Polish foreign correspondent with a keen eye and a compelling style that puts the reader right in the political moment, takes us to the Iranian revolution of 1979. Through him we witness how quickly a power structure can collapse and the popular consciousness shift from submission to resistance and, ultimately, revolt.

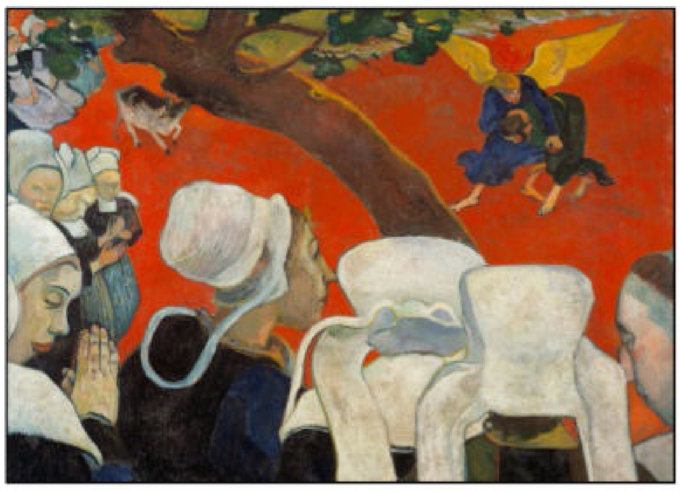
Titles in print are available from The Week Bookshop on 020-3176 3835. For out-of-print books visit biblio.co.uk

The Week's guide to what's worth seeing

Showing now

Welsh National Opera's "irrepressibly buoyant" **Blaze of Glory!** – about a group of 1950s miners who form a choir – continues its tour, (Daily Telegraph). Until 20 May, various venues (wno.org.uk).

After Impressionism: Inventing Modern Art traces the influence of Cézanne, van Gogh and Gauguin on their peers and subsequent generations of artists. It features more than 100 works on loan from MoMA, Musée d'Orsay and elsewhere. Until 13 August, The National Gallery, London WC2 (nationalgallery.org.uk).



Gauguin's Vision of the Sermon (1888)

Book now

The London Philharmonic Orchestra performs **Mahler's Fifth** – the composer's love letter to his wife – alongside the world premiere of a new piece by the LPO's composer-in-residence, Brett Dean. 26 April, Southbank Centre, London SE1 (lpo.org.uk).

Events are selling out fast for the **Stratford Literary Festival**, which will be welcoming Maggie O'Farrell, Peter Frankopan and the actors Brian Cox and Penelope Wilton. 2-7 May, various venues, Stratford-upon-Avon (stratfordliteraryfestival.co.uk).

The Motive and the Cue, Jack Thorne's new drama about the build-up to Richard Burton's *Hamlet* in 1964, looks set to be a hit. Johnny Flynn plays Burton, Mark Gatiss takes the role of John Gielgud (the production's director), and Sam Mendes directs. 20 April-15 July, National Theatre, London SE1 (nationaltheatre.org.uk).

The Archers: what happened last week

Clarrie is irritated by Eddie shirking jobs and guesses he's up to no good. Alice gets a shock when she sees Joy wearing one of Jennifer's scarves; Brian comforts her and announces he's leaving Willow Cottage. It's Paul's last week in Ambridge before Denise's return; Josh suggests he move into The Stables. Helen announces to Susan and Clarrie that the dairy window is going in the next day – they'll get two paid days off. Adam takes Brian to the Cheltenham Festival for some bonding. Susan convinces Clarrie to have a day out, while pretending to be at work. Eventually, Clarrie is rumbled by Eddie only to discover that he's relocated Susan's pergola to Grange Farm, while Neil builds Susan a summer house. Susan continues to help Jim petition against the vehicle charging station. Adam and Alice both invite Brian to move in, but he declines. At his leaving do, Paul gets a call from Denise – she's being posted elsewhere; he's staying in Ambridge. After Usha shows him round, Brian decides to rent a cottage on the outskirts – he doesn't want to burden his children.

Television

Programmes

Fortress Britain with Alice Roberts A look at Britain's obsession with invasion through history, starting with Henry VIII's fear of the threat from Catholic Europe. Sat 25 Mar, C4 20:30 (60mins).

Great Expectations New six-part adaptation of Dickens' coming-of-age classic by screenwriter Steven Knight, with Olivia Colman as Miss Havisham. Sun 26 Mar, BBC1 21:00 (60mins).

Blue Lights New crime drama set in Belfast, about three PSNI officers. New recruit Angela promises to help a woman whose son has been drawn into a gang. Mon 27 Mar, BBC1 21:00 (60mins).

Bear Grylls Meets President Zelenskyy Film following Grylls on a three-day trip to Ukraine to meet its president in Kyiv, and his encounters with ordinary Ukrainians on the way. Tue 28 Mar, C4 20:00 (60mins).

Get On Up: The Triumph of Black America Actor David Harewood travels across the US to discover how African-American musicians, artists and writers have transformed popular culture. Thur 30 Mar, BBC2 21:00 (60mins).

Films

Luzzu (2021) Powerful Maltese drama about a fisherman who is faced with stark choices when his baby son needs costly medical treatment; "a future neo-realist classic" (Guardian). Sat 25 Mar, BBC4 21:00 (90mins).

Rocketman (2019) All-singing, all-dancing film about Elton John's early life and breakthrough years, starring Taron Egerton. Sat 25 Mar, Film4 21:00 (145mins).

New to subscription TV

Succession The bickering, backstabbing Roy family return for a fourth and final series. From 27 March, on Sky Atlantic/NOW.

Extrapolations This slightly clichéd anthology series about catastrophic climate change is almost saved by an impossibly "starry cast" that includes Meryl Streep (Guardian). On Apple TV+.

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ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

New gold one-eighth sovereign for Charles III - commemorating the accession of a British monarch for the first time in history!

After more than seven decades, Britain has a new monarch, our first king since the mid-twentieth century. There are generations alive today for whom this will be the first time they have uttered the words "God save the king".

In this day-and-age of instant news it's easy to gloss over just how significant this event is: the last time there was a change of monarch in Britain, the average house price was just under £1,900, wartime rationing was still in place, a pint of beer cost 9p, a pint of milk 4p, and only 8% of households owned a fridge!

This illustrates just how long it's been since Britain had a new monarch. This is an event that many people may only ever see once in their lifetime.

To mark this important event in the history of our nation, the accession of King Charles III is being marked with a special commemorative gold one-eighth sovereign coin.

What makes this coin of even greater significance is that it is the first sovereign coin of its kind ever to mark the accession of a British monarch!

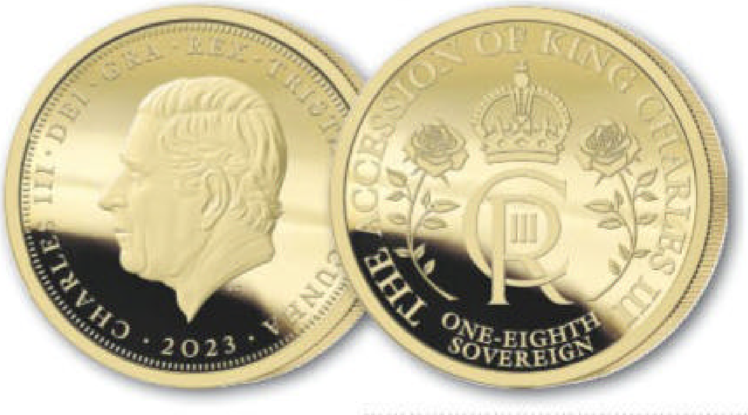
FIRST EVER ACCESSION SOVEREIGN, FEATURING THE KING'S ROYAL CYPHER

On the reverse is the King's royal cypher, comprised of a large letter C intertwined with the letter R (for 'Rex') inside which are the roman numerals 'III'. These are surmounted by a crown.

The obverse of this coin is significant too – a new portrait of the King by artist Jody Clark, designer of the fifth (and final) coinage portrait of Queen Elizabeth II. Charles faces left, which is the opposite direction to his mother, in accordance with centuries of royal tradition.

THE ACCESSION OF KING CHARLES III
ONE-EIGHTH SOVEREIGN

This new gold one-eighth sovereign is the first of its kind ever to commemorate the accession of a British monarch. Only 6,999 have been produced. Hattons of London have an introductory price of £69 (plus £4.99 P&P) but only until 31st May 2023 (after which the price will be £149) and this price is subject to availability. There is a limit of one per household. Solid 22 carat gold. Diameter: 11.0mm


CHARLES III · DEI · GRA · REX · TRISTAN DA CUNHA · 2023
THE ACCESSION OF KING CHARLES III
ONE-EIGHTH SOVEREIGN

FEWER THAN 1-IN-3000 UK HOUSEHOLDS CAN OWN ONE

This new coin is certain to be highly sought-after, **but just 6,999 have been minted**. Authorised by Tristan da Cunha it has been approved by both the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and Buckingham Palace.

The strict mintage limitation means that **fewer than one in every three thousand UK households can own one.**

HOW TO SECURE ONE FOR YOURSELF

Those interested in owning one of these world-first gold coins may do so now by taking advantage of the introductory price being offered by Hattons of London. The coin is available for just £69 (plus £4.99 P&P) but only until 31st May 2023 after which the price will be £149. Applicants must be aged 18 years or over and this offer is subject to availability. A strict limit of one per household applies.

Each coin comes with a 60 day full right of return. The contact details for Hattons of London appear below. Note this offer is not available elsewhere.

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It takes considerable time to design, sample, cut dies, strike then have approved, gold sovereign coins. King Charles III is the first monarch to accede in the digital age, which reduces the time for some (but not all) of these arduous stages. There is also usually very little warning of the accession of a new monarch, coming as it does upon the death of their predecessor. This means there is usually no advance preparation.

This is why this is the first one-eighth gold sovereign coin ever to mark the accession of a new British monarch.

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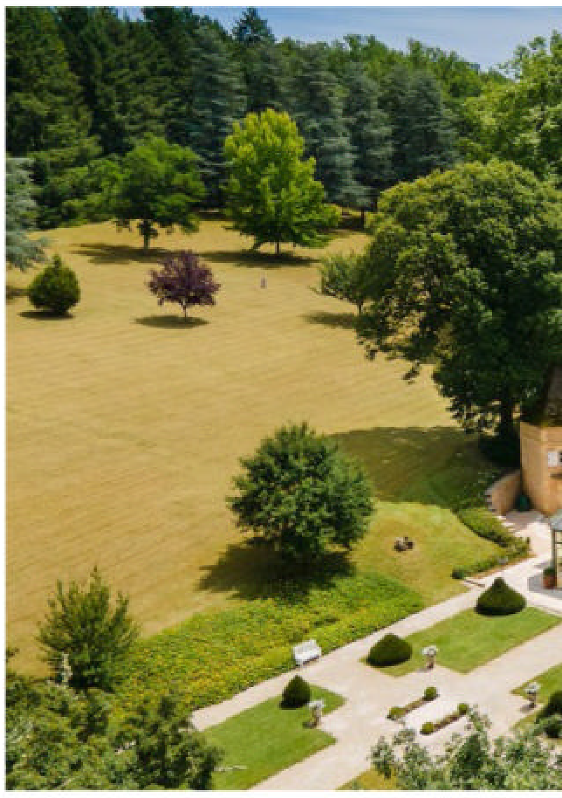
Fabulous French châteaux

▲ **Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes:** Château de la Rivière, Chareil-Cintrat. A fortified house dating back to the 14th century on the banks of the river Bouble. 10 beds, 6 baths, multiple receps, swimming pool, tennis court, garden, outbuildings, parking. €1.28m; Efficity (00 33 1 73 43 89 76).

▲ **Lot-et-Garonne:** Petit Nérac, Nérac. Built in 1750, the castle is flanked by two turrets. The writer François Mauriac stayed here and featured it in one of his books. 7 beds, family bath, 2 shower rooms, kitchen, 3 receps, self-contained studio, garden, outbuildings. €1.166m; Hamilton (00 33 5 62 29 59 57).

◀ **Indre:** Néons-sur-Creuse. A 15th century castle set in 8 hectares of landscaped gardens. Main suite, 7 further beds (4 en suite), kitchen/dining room, 4 receps, 3 self-contained gîtes with 7 beds, pool, hot tub, pool house. €1.99m; Savills (00 33 5 56 71 36 59).

▶ **Dordogne:** Sarlat-la-Canéda. A 17th century thackstone-roof château. 8 beds, 6 baths, 2 kitchens, multiple receps, cinema room, swimming pool, lake, garden, 3-bed cottage, 1-bed cottage. €3.9m; Savills (00 33 5 56 71 36 59).



◀ **Dordogne:** Château Fleurac, Sarlat-la-Canéda. An elegant neo-gothic château built in 1800. Main suite, 22 further beds (11 en suite), 10 baths, multiple receps, self-contained 5-bed guesthouse, 2-bed apartment, wellness suite, pool, garden. POA; Christie's (00 33 6 74 27 26 86).

▼ **Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes:** Gillonnay, Isère. A 17th century château with far-reaching views from 85 acres of gardens and land. Main suite, 9 further beds, family bath, 3 shower rooms, kitchen, dining room, 3 further receps, chapel, lift, self-contained 2-bed cottage, outbuildings, garden, garage. €2.6m; Prestige Property (01935-817188).

◀ **Pays de la Loire:** Anjou, Angers. Built in the 17th century with Belle Époque additions. 7 beds, kitchen, 2 receps, chapel, self-contained attic apartment, coach house, garden. €794,000; Emmanuelle Lego (00 33 1 73 06 09 56).

▲ **Poitou-Charentes:** Jazeneuil, Vienne. An elegant château set in 23 acres. 8 beds, 4 baths, 3 shower rooms, 2 kitchens, 4 receps, chapel, swimming pool, outbuildings, garden, 2-bed cottage. €1.35m; Hamptons (020-7265 6571).

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What the experts say

How to obey the laws of the fridge

Last month, the Food Standards Agency reneged on its long-standing advice not to put potatoes in the fridge, in the light of new research showing that chilling spuds doesn't make them any more harmful, and makes them last longer. But spuds aren't the only item we've been storing all wrong, says Sarah Rainey in the Daily Mail. Other vegetables that people tend to keep in their fridges ought to come out: aubergines and peppers tend to go "soggy" when chilled, and are best kept at room temperature. Most fruits, by contrast, should be refrigerated – with the exception of bananas, which will turn black in the cold. As for ketchup – mainstay of fridge doors – experts insist that with all that sugar and vinegar acting as natural preservatives, it should keep perfectly well in the pantry. By contrast, nuts contain oils that can go rancid in a room-temperature cupboard.

The peculiar craze for tinned fish

"History shows us that there is no morsel that cannot be hauled into fashionability," says Ed Cumming in The Daily Telegraph. Take 'nduja, an obscure spicy sausage, which seemed to appear overnight on every pizza. Or the craze, ten years ago, for the croissant-doughnut hybrid known as the "cronut". The latest foodie fad is for tinned fish – "not your usual salmon or tuna", but fancier options such as mussels, calamari, sardines and octopus. TikTokers refer to #tinfishdatenight; Ortiz's distinctive yellow tins are "everywhere"; and demand is such that at a new restaurant in Mayfair, Saltie Girl, "you can pay £52 for a single tin of cockles". Although I have "no particular beef with tinned fish", this trend strikes me as one that "could have been cooked up in a lab". It seems designed to appeal to the perennial British thirst for an "idealised Mediterranean lifestyle", while exploiting a "certain patriotism": a new breed of manufacturer is seeking to preserve the "bounty of our coasts" by preserving British seafood in cans. The marketing appears to be working – sales have risen sharply – but it won't make me overcome my scepticism. "A tin of pilchards might be fine when you're sat at a bar in Mallorca, but I'm not going to open a tin of sardines for a dinner party."

Blood oranges: their moment has arrived

A fine time for blood oranges

Blood oranges are "one of the great citrus treats of this part of the year", says Bee Wilson in the Financial Times. Not only do they have that striking deep colour – as though they've been soaked in sunset, according to one Italian writer – but they have a remarkable "perfumed" flavour too. Both the fruit's colour and "berry-like" taste are produced by chemicals called anthocyanins, which are found in other deep-coloured fruits such as blackcurrants and blueberries. In most varieties, these are only triggered "when the night-time temperature is at least 10°C cooler than the day time during autumn and winter" – hence why blood oranges only thrive in certain places, such as at the foot of Mount Etna in Sicily. Perhaps the most glorious way to enjoy them is as they come – "juices staining your hand, Lady Macbeth-style". But they also work well in many sweet and savoury dishes. "A caramelised blood orange can be very pleasing," as is Claire Saffitz's celebrated blood orange and olive oil cake. Or use them in a salad. "In Sicily, cooks slice them thinly into a salad along with olive oil, fennel and salt."

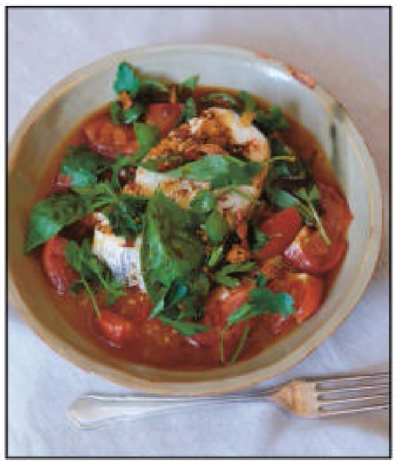
Recipe of the week: hake and soft tomatoes with chilli butter

If you ate the tomatoes on their own, they'd make for an oddly elegant dinner, says Eleanor Steafel. But with the fish and the chilli butter, they turn into something really special. You can easily adjust the ingredients for the tomatoes to make a batch; leftovers can be blitzed for a sweet, fresh tomato sauce, or spread on bread with anchovies for *pan con tomate*.

Serves 1

***For the tomatoes:** olive oil, for frying 290g plum tomatoes, quartered ½ tsp flaky salt, plus extra to season and finish 1 garlic clove, finely sliced a splash of red wine vinegar* ***For the fish:** a chunky hake steak, skin on 35g butter 1 garlic clove, finely sliced ½ a small red chilli, deseeded and finely chopped a pinch of smoked paprika thick slices of good bread a few sprigs of flat-leaf parsley, roughly torn a few big basil leaves flaky salt a lemon wedge, to serve (optional)*

- Heat a good glug of olive oil in a small frying pan or a casserole pan with a lid over a very low heat. If you can, pick a pan that is going to be able to fit the tomato wedges in a single, snug layer over the bottom. Arrange the tomato quarters in concentric circles. Sprinkle over the salt and garlic.
- Put the lid on and leave the tomatoes to cook for 30 mins – don't move the pan too much, just leave the tomatoes to cook slowly, until they release lots of sweet juices and slump a little.
- Shake over a little vinegar, smash the tomatoes with the back of a spoon, replace the lid and cook for another 5 mins, so they return to a simmer.
- Meanwhile, sprinkle the hake with salt. Set a small frying pan over a medium heat. Add a splash of olive oil and, when hot, fry the fish, skin-side down for 3 mins until the skin crisps and the flesh starts to cook. Then, remove the pan from the heat and transfer the fish to the tomatoes, lowering it into the pan so the skin stays above the liquid and the flesh can continue cooking in the simmering juices. Cook for 3 mins, until the fish is cooked through.
- Meanwhile, melt the butter in a small saucepan with the sliced garlic, the chopped chilli and the paprika, plus a pinch of salt. Let it foam up and cook for a minute, swirling the pan as it does. Set the flavoured butter aside in the pan.
- Toast the bread (either in a toaster or on a griddle pan), then drizzle it with oil and sprinkle it with flaky salt.
- Finish the tomatoes and fish with the chilli butter and herbs. Serve with a wedge of lemon, if you wish.



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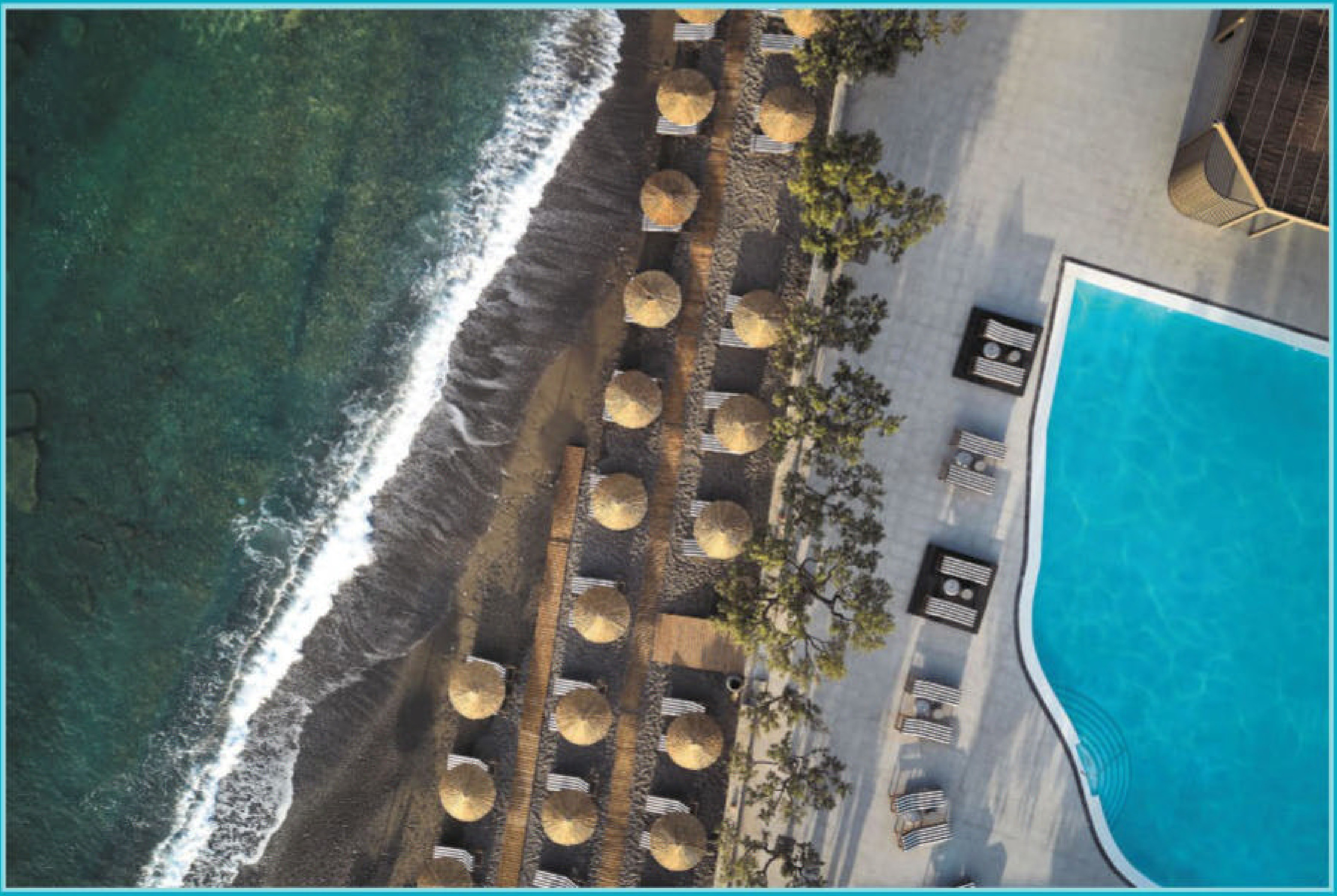
Taken from The Art of Friday Night Dinner *by Eleanor Steafel, published by Bloomsbury at £26. To buy from* The Week Bookshop *for £20.99, call 020-3176 3835 or visit theweekbookshop.co.uk.*



Hotel of the week

Numo Ierapetra, Crete

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Consumer

New cars: what the critics say

Suzuki S-Cross Hybrid
Price: from about £25,000

Auto Express
Suzuki's compact S-Cross SUV is now available in two iterations: as a manual mild-hybrid; and in this new full-hybrid automatic version with a 1.5-litre engine and larger battery, which is designed to reduce emissions and improve fuel economy. It's got plenty of kit, is well-priced, and the four-wheel drive option is pretty unique in the sector. However, the automated manual gearbox means it isn't very smooth to drive.

Car Magazine
With just 112bhp, performance is a bit disappointing. 0-62mph takes a "pedestrian" 12.7 seconds in the front-wheel drive Motion model, and a "glacial" 13.5secs in the Ultra four-wheel drive (compared with 9.5secs in the mild-hybrid). And the full hybrid isn't much more efficient either – fuel economy is 54.3mpg and 48.7mpg respectively, compared with 47.8mpg in the mild-hybrid model.

The Daily Telegraph
The full hybrid is well-balanced in bends, with a decent amount of grip, but steering is "disconcertingly light". Inside feels a bit cheap: the interior plastics are flimsy and switches look a bit dated, though there's Apple CarPlay and Android Auto as standard. It's roomy enough up front, but a bit more of a squeeze in the back; and the battery takes up a big chunk of boot space – 293 litres isn't enough for a family car.

The best... sparkling water makers

▶ **Philips Water ADD4902BK/10 GoZero** This minimalist 1-litre soda maker injects a consistently high volume of carbon dioxide per press, without the need for power. It's fast, and is simple to use, clean and store (£69; amazon.co.uk).

▶ **Mysoda Woody sparkling water maker** Made from a renewable wood composite, in a range of colours, this one comes with a 1-litre drinking bottle. Each press produces a consistent amount of CO_2, but it is a little larger than some models. Testers reported that the fizziness seemed to fade in the mouth, which some people might like (about £70; finnishdesignshop.com).

◀ **DrinkMate OmniFizz** Thanks to its innovative lid design, this machine can carbonate not only water, but other liquids too, from wine to iced tea. It is quick, and fairly quiet to use, and comes in four colours (£110; drinkmate.uk).

▶ **Aarke Carbonator 3 with copper finish** This Swedish-designed carbonator is not the quickest machine, but it offers consistent results and has a handy alert to let you know when your water is done (£179; lakeland.co.uk).

◀ **SodaStream Art** Easy to use, this quiet, premium soda maker has "Quick Connect" technology for fast cylinder insertion. With this one, you pull the lever to get the fizz. The Hydration Kit Plus version includes six bottles of flavour concentrate and two dishwasher-safe bottles (from £130; sodastream.co.uk).

SOURCE: GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

Tips of the week... how to clean a mattress

- Ideally, mattresses should be cleaned every three to six months.
- Using the upholstery attachment on your hoover, vacuum the mattress, including the sides, paying special attention to seams and other crevices. Vacuum the base if possible too, and also under the bed.
- Never sponge your mattress or pour water on it. The jury is out on the use of steamers: some people think that using them will encourage bacteria.
- Instead, to get rid of stains, buy an appropriate stain remover and follow the instructions. A DIY 50/50 mix of hydrogen peroxide and cold water can be effective on urine stains, but apply it carefully as a spray.
- Sprinkle the mattress with baking soda to deodorise it and soak up any excess moisture, then leave it to air for several hours. Open all the windows, and, if you can, move the mattress into the sunlight to help kill mould or bacteria. Then use the vacuum to clean up the baking soda.

SOURCE: T3

And for those who have everything...

McLaren has used Formula 1 technology to create the Lavoie Series 1 battery powered e-scooter. Made from lightweight magnesium, it has a top speed of over 30mph (but under current British law, you can only ride it on private land).
Coming soon, price TBC; lavoielectric.com

SOURCE: THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

Where to find... music festivals in Europe

Rock en Seine in the Paris suburbs features a stellar line-up for its 20th anniversary – The Strokes, Foals, Placebo, Billie Eilish and Florence + the Machine are all performing (23-27 Aug; rockenseine.com, £66-£155).

The last two are also on the line-up at Budapest's quirky **Sziget**, on an island on the Danube, along with David Guetta and Lorde (10-15 Aug; szigetfestival.com, £308).

The **Primavera Sound** festival in Barcelona is famed for the diversity of the acts. This year the Pet Shop Boys, Jake Bugg, New Order and Calvin Harris are headlining (1-3 Jun; primaverasound.com, £110-£296).

Open'er, in Gdynia on Poland's Baltic coast, hosts the Arctic Monkeys, Lizzo, Lil Nas X, Kendrick Lamar and Christine and the Queens (28 Jun-1 Jul; opener.pl, £84-£222).

Launched in 1971, **Roskilde** in Denmark is the biggest music festival in Scandinavia. Blur, Rosalía, Lil Nas X, Burna Boy and Fever Ray are signed up for this year (24 Jun-1 Jul; roskilde-festival.dk, £142-£284).

SOURCE: THE TIMES

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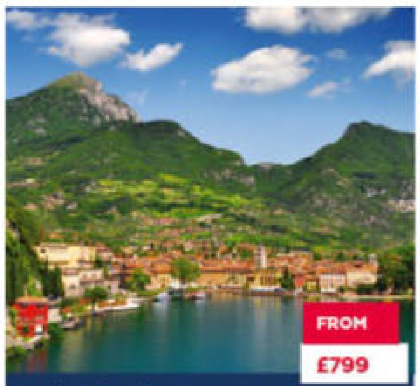

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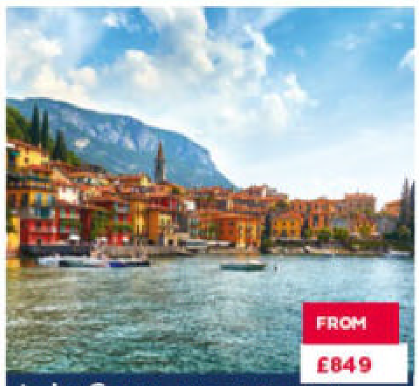

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- A full day excursion to Milan

Holiday Departure Months

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D

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Iraq: the cultural resilience of a war-ravaged country

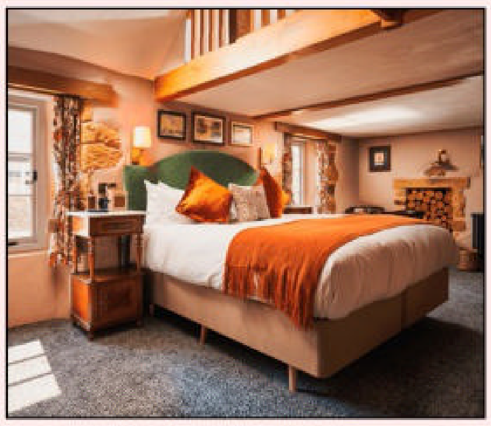
It is 20 years since the US-led invasion of Iraq (*see page 13*), and the Foreign Office still advises against travel there, owing to risks including kidnapping. But although the country is "by no means stable", it is "just about functioning as a rare Arab democracy", says Sophy Roberts in the FT – and these "green shoots" are now attracting a few pioneering tour operators, such as the US-based Geographic Expeditions. On one of its trips from Basra to Baghdad, you will visit "thriving" modern neighbourhoods, and some of the world's greatest archaeological sites. This is not a journey "for everyone" – the horrors of the recent past cannot be ignored; but you do get an impressive sense of cultural "resilience", and a welcome wherever you go.

The Ziggurat of Ur: a great site of ancient Mesopotamia

Basra is no longer the idyllic city of canals and rambling gardens it once was, but there's still life and beauty here, from the grand Ottoman mansions of the historic quarter to the main corniche, where fashionable young men pose for photographs among hawkers selling candyfloss. To the north lies Nassiriya, which has an "atmospheric" bazaar selling Iranian saffron, jewellery and scents. And then come the great sites of ancient Mesopotamia, including the 4,000-year-old Ziggurat of Ur, "its central steps etched sharp against the sky", and Uruk, the Sumerian city that features in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Equally impressive are the "sun-baked" ruins of Ctesiphon, and the 8th century fort of Ukhaidir, an "Escher-esque labyrinth" of vaulted halls and stairs.

At the Shia pilgrimage site of Najaf, the crowd flows between marble pillars, over crimson carpets and under arches covered in tiny mirrored tiles towards Imam Ali's shrine in the splendid domed mosque. Baghdad has a lively secular life, from buzzing coffee houses and streets full of bookshops to the Iraq Museum, a "world-class" repository of ancient treasures. *An 11-night small-group trip with Geographic Expeditions costs from £8,650pp (geoex.com).*

Hotel of the week



Masons Arms

Branscombe, Devon

Ten minutes' walk from Branscombe Beach, this 14th century pub-with-rooms has recently emerged from a stylish, £2m makeover by the St Austell Brewery, says Richard Mellor in The Times. Eight of the 28 rooms are above the pub, and the rest are in nearby stone-and-thatch, terraced cottages. Some have claw-foot bathtubs and terraces overlooking the sea, while walk-in showers, Hypnos mattresses, and espresso machines are standard. There are two family rooms. The modern British cooking is "not fussy haute cuisine", but is all the better for it, and breakfasts are "just as tasty".

Doubles from £120 b&b; masonsarms.co.uk

Getting the flavour of...

Wine tasting in *Sideways* territory

Perhaps best known as the setting of the hit film *Sideways*, the Santa Ynez Valley is "one of California's most intriguing wine regions", says David Amsden in Condé Nast Traveller. Fifty years since its first vineyards were planted, it is still dominated by independent producers, and offers "the thrill of discovery" as well as "back-road charm" with its quirky small towns, lively tasting rooms and flourishing restaurant scene. Stay at Skyview or Hotel Ynez (both "chicly reimagined" motels), The Ballard Inn or the ("exquisite") The Inn at Mattei's Tavern. Good places to eat include the "French-inspired" Bell's (recently awarded its first Michelin star) and Bar Le Côté, "arguably the hottest restaurant in the Valley these days". Be sure to plan your itinerary in advance – some of the best vineyards offer visits, tastings and guided hikes by appointment only.

A seaside holiday in Bulgaria

With dependable sunshine, pretty towns and "miles and miles" of golden sand, Bulgaria's Black Sea coast is perfect for a family summer holiday, says Rudolf Abraham in The Sunday Telegraph. It's much cheaper than the Med, and likely to be a bit cooler too. The resort town of Albena – purpose-built in the 1960s – makes for a relaxing base, with its gently sloping beach, forested surroundings and extensive facilities. There are wilder beaches nearby – including Bolata (in the Kaliakra Nature Reserve), and Tyulenovo, which has "breathtaking" cliffs. The neighbouring city of Varna has good restaurants, museums and archaeological sites, including Europe's fourth-largest Roman baths. And – further afield – the fishing port of Sozopol, which is "crammed" with 19th century wooden houses, and the attractive town of Nessebar (known for its Byzantine churches) are also worth a visit.

Bear spotting in Finland

The forests of Finland are home to roughly 2,000 European brown bears, and there's a smattering of hides from which you can watch them "eat, court and play", says Phoebe Smith in The Guardian. Guests at the Bear Centre in Vartius – just over a mile from the Russian border – can safely wander along marked trails by day, looking out for birds including eagles, woodpeckers and multiple species of owl. By night, guides will lead them to their own individual hides, which vary from "very basic" to "luxurious", with huge picture windows, kitchenettes and showers. Daylight hours are longest in June and July; August and September offer the best chance of seeing cubs; and October brings with it the possibility of early snow. Wolves and wolverines often put in an appearance too. *See bearcentre.fi for more information.*

Last-minute offers from top travel companies

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The 5-day adventure begins with 2 nights in Warsaw; then a train takes you to Gdansk for a further 2 nights. From £399pp b&b (incl. Manchester flights). 020-3993 8311, viva-holidays.co.uk. Depart in May.

Australia in 12 days

Explore the vibrant cities of Sydney, Cairns, Adelaide and Melbourne on this exciting trip. From £3,399pp b&b (incl. London flights). 020-3883 6220, exoticca.com. Depart 31 October.

A touch of Vietnam

From the vibrant metropolis of Ho Chi Minh to the beaches of Phan Thiet, an 8-night trip costs from £1,814pp b&b (incl. Dublin flights). 020-8175 1145, tourcompass.co.uk. Depart 25 May.

Covid-19: please check government websites for testing and quarantine requirements, and the rules surrounding children (gov.uk).

Renowned sculptor who was also an influential art teacher

Dame Phyllida Barlow 1944-2023

Phyllida Barlow was 16 years old, and in her first term at art school, when one of her teachers noted that her painting had a sculptural quality, and suggested that she work in clay instead. It was, she said, "an awakening". Yet it would be 50 years before she had her first major exhibition, at the Serpentine Gallery in London. Such was its success, her work was then shown at galleries all over the world, including Tate Britain; and in 2017, when she was 73, she was selected to represent Britain at the Venice Biennale. The media lapped up this story of late-life success, said The Times, though Barlow herself wasn't entirely happy about "the focus on the little old lady living in Finsbury Park who has had five children", and whose materials are salvaged from "rummaging around in her skip".

Barlow: staged guerrilla installations

She had, she said, never sourced materials from skips. However, her installations were formed from detritus: old planks, pallets, doors, plastic sheets and blocks of polystyrene, arranged in vast, teetering piles. Fascinated by abandoned industrial objects, she described her work as jokey but menacing reflections on the "false solidity" of conventional architecture. As she pointed out, the early 21st century had been defined by monuments coming down – from the Twin Towers to the statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad. Of course, as an artist she was not really a "late starter". She had worked for years in relative obscurity because she had not believed that her "strange fumblings in the studio" would resonate with an audience. Sometimes, she'd left her pieces on roadsides, to be picked up by passers-by or just to rot; others she had recycled into new works. But during that time, she had been busy teaching – rising to become professor of art, and the director of undergraduate studies, at the Slade, and Rachel Whiteread, Tacita Dean and Martin Creed were among her pupils.

Phyllida Barlow was born in Newcastle, in 1944, to Brigit Black, a writer, and Erasmus Barlow, a psychiatrist. Her forebears included Charles Darwin. After the War, the family moved to Richmond, southwest London. The sight of the ruined city, and its reconstruction, had a profound effect on Barlow, said The New York Times, and later became "intrinsic" to her art. In 1960, she enrolled at the Chelsea School of Art. After leaving there, she went to the Slade, where she recalled one of her male tutors telling her that he'd not be bothering with her much, because "by the time you're 30, you'll be having babies and making jam".

At Chelsea, aged 18, she'd met Fabian, the son of the writer and artist Mervyn Peake, who became her husband. They moved into a shabby house overlooking a railway yard in Finsbury Park, with a small studio. Barlow taught at several art colleges, between breaks in which she cared for her five children, before returning to the Slade in 1986. She didn't show her work formally, but in the 1980s and 1990s, she staged guerrilla installations in playgrounds and in a defunct factory, said The Guardian. Sometimes, she'd hurl pieces into the Thames at night. Many of her pupils loved her; some of them became very famous, and it was thanks to them that Iwan Wirth, of Hauser & Wirth, heard her name. He visited her chaotic home, and decided that she was "vintage Hauser & Wirth". After that, things moved quickly. She became a fellow of the Royal Academy in 2011; she was awarded the CBE in 2015, and was made a Dame in 2021. Owing to her newfound success, she was able to move her studio into a 12,000sq ft warehouse, where she could create ever larger pieces. "I love big sculpture," she said, "that sense of my own physicality being in competition with something that has no rational need to be in the world at all. And I think that is in itself just an expression of the human condition, of who we are and what we are."

The diffident American who pioneered the "Fosbury flop"

Dick Fosbury 1947-2023

In 1968, a diffident, 6ft 4in tall American won a gold medal in the high jump at the Olympic Games in Mexico – and in so doing, transformed a sporting event in a way that, arguably, no one else has done before or since, said The Times. Originally, athletes attempting the high jump would run to the bar, jump more or less straight up, then kick their legs over in a scissor motion; later, they started to leap head and chest first, straddling each leg individually and landing face down in a roll. Dick Fosbury, who has died aged 76, had developed a rather different move. He'd run up to the bar diagonally, then pivot in order to take off backwards, leading with his shoulders. He'd then arch his back, kick his legs over, and flop backwards onto the mat, landing more or less on the back of his neck.

Fosbury: raised the bar

Richard Fosbury was born in Portland, Oregon, in 1947. He played football in high school, but wasn't good enough to make the school team, so he turned instead to athletics. He didn't do much better as a high jumper, however, until he started experimenting with his new technique. His school coach wasn't sure it was legal, let alone safe or effective; but Fosbury persevered – and before long, he'd added a full 12 inches to his personal best. In 1964, a photograph of him jumping was published in a local newspaper above the caption "Fosbury flops over bar". But it wasn't just the move that was unconventional, said The New York Times. Fosbury wore mismatched shoes; he had "the arm muscles of a chess player"; and before each run-up, he would rock back and forth on his feet, clenching and unclenching his fists, often for up to two minutes.

In 1968, he won a college title, clearing 7ft 2¼in, and scraped a place on the US Olympic team. In Mexico he was regarded as something of a curiosity, but the bar kept being raised, and Fosbury kept flopping over it. Even after his victory, some predicted that the technique was just a fad. But physicists had worked out that it conferred a real advantage: as the athlete's back arches over the pole, their centre of gravity remains below the pole, meaning less energy is used. And when this became apparent in practice, the flop took off. (It helped that in the 1960s, many gyms had bought foam mats, said The Guardian: previously, they'd had sawdust-filled pits, and athletes who'd tried the flop would have risked breaking their necks.) By the 1972 Munich Olympics, 28 out of the 40 high jump contenders were using it. Fosbury himself, however, was not there as he had failed to qualify. Having struggled with the attention his victory brought, he had completed his degree in engineering, and moved to Idaho to begin his new career. "I didn't want to be on a pedestal," he explained. "I received my medal and I wanted to be back on the ground with everyone else."

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Companies in the news

...and how they were assessed

SVB/Signature/First Republic: the clear-up

American watchdogs "tend to give bank mergers a tough time", said John Foley on Reuters Breakingviews – "until a lender hits the skids". That much was apparent over the weekend when "chunks" of Signature Bank, the second domino to fall after Silicon Valley Bank, were snapped up "for a song" by a rival "after getting a lightning-fast nod" from regulators. Markets were gung-ho at the prospect: shares in Signature's acquirer, New York Community Bancorp, jumped 39%. But elsewhere, the clean-up after the crash is proving less easy. The fate of SVB itself still hangs in the balance, said the Financial Times. In the absence of any firm offer "for the bank as a whole", a carve-up seems likely. Federal regulators have "extended the bidding period... while also expanding the pool of institutions they are willing to accept as potential buyers of assets and deposits". Meanwhile, frantic efforts to shore up other regional lenders – notably fellow California bank First Republic – have now taken centre stage, said The Wall Street Journal. Last week, "11 big banks banded together" to deposit $30bn in First Republic in an initiative led by JPMorgan's Jamie Dimon, a celebrated survivor of the 2008 crisis. Not even that restored confidence. Shares in First Republic, which has lost some $70bn in deposits since SVB fell, plummeted by over 40% on Monday. It's still febrile out there.

HSBC: playing a blinder?

By contrast, Britain's swift and effective handling of the SVB debacle has won plaudits. Over 72 hours, HSBC – "a bank not renowned for its fleetness of foot" – swiftly assessed SVB UK's financial position, and the likely damage from its US parent, and "decided to take a punt", said Philip Augar in the FT. With a $3trn global balance sheet, HSBC could stomach the risk of SVB UK's £5.5bn loan book. Moreover, the rescue was "a win" for the bank and the City "at a time when both needed it". HSBC has been under pressure from the Chinese insurer, Ping An, to split its Asian and Western arms. This move – using "a balance sheet built up on one continent to underpin an acquisition in another" – is not "a definitive answer to calls for a break-up", but it "certainly helps". The City, meanwhile, has been under the cosh for its failure to list and retain growth companies on the London Stock Exchange, making the preservation of SVB UK's 3,300-odd start-ups all the more important. HSBC's boss Noel Quinn, who intends running his newly acquired baby as a standalone unit within the UK bank, is already "touting his credentials as the banker to the tech titans of the future", said Jill Treanor in The Sunday Times. "It would have been a crying shame to let these companies flounder," he said.

Amazon: a different kind of job cut

Wall Street usually cheers when over-staffed big tech firms hack off some dead wood. Not this time, said Dan Gallagher in The Wall Street Journal. Amazon shares fell 2% on news that the online giant is cutting another 9,000 roles this year, on top of 18,000 announced in January. It was mainly because the latest lay-offs – in the cloud, advertising, and video-game streaming Twitch businesses – are now "affecting" the company's main "revenue-driving segments". Even the cloud, it seems, isn't immune to the slowing economy. "A company that employs 1.5 million people ought to be able to get by with a few less. But a few less in the wrong areas... sends a worrisome message."

Seven days in the Square Mile

UK inflation unexpectedly climbed for the first time in four months in February, increasing pressure on the Bank of England, which met this week to set interest rates. The consumer prices index rose by 10.4% year-on-year, surprising economists who had predicted a fall to 9.9%. Rising food inflation was the main culprit, said the ONS: sharpened by the fruit and veg rationing seen in shops last month.

Stock markets regained their equilibrium following the recent string of bank failures. Indices globally bounced back ahead of this week's key US Fed interest rate decision. Analysts suggested that a pause in the hawkish Fed's tightening programme would signal it really is worried about the banking panic; an increase, by contrast, would signal it thinks the crisis is under control.

The Swiss government said it would suspend deferred bonuses for Credit Suisse employees granted before 2022. Fiona McBain, the chair of Scottish Mortgage, stood down following a corporate governance row. Chris O'Shea, CEO of British Gas-owner Centrica, will receive bonuses worth £3.7m after the firm posted record profits. A survey by Fishbowl found that 43% of professionals have used AI tools such as ChatGPT at work, with most failing to inform their bosses. MindGeek, the company behind the website Pornhub, was sold to Canadian private equity firm Ethical Capital Partners for an undisclosed sum.

John Lewis Partnership: a historic shift for our mutual friend?

For only the second time since 1953, the "partners" – employees – of John Lewis and Waitrose are missing out on their annual bonus after what chair Sharon White described as "another very tough year". Losses at the employee-owned retail group ballooned to £234m last year, from £27m the year previously, "largely as a result of property write-downs", said Jane Denton on This is Money. Trading was also adversely affected by inflation, which White said "hit us like a hurricane". She hinted that staff cuts were likely. But there's at least one new appointment. Former Hovis boss Nish Kankiwala will become the partnership's first ever chief executive, tasked with cutting costs and bolstering the balance sheet.

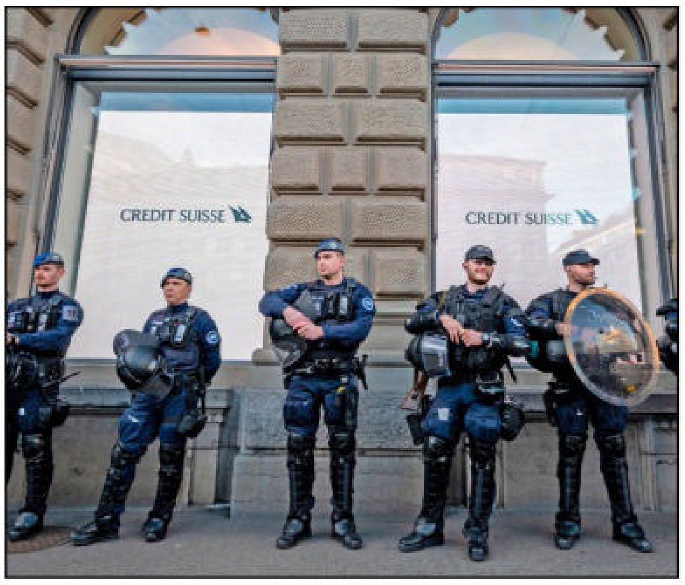
Sharon White: mulling changes

They might be "national treasures", but both John Lewis and its "upscale" supermarket are feeling the strain in cost-conscious Britain and have "fallen from grace", said Andrea Felsted on Bloomberg. Some analysts argue that non-core activities – such as the "build to rent" property arm and financial services business – have become expensive distractions. Salvation lies in more focus on "being a better shopkeeper".

White remains convinced that retail alone "can no longer sustain" the partnership, said Sarah Butler in The Guardian. Hence the push into new territory, and possibly a new ownership model too. John Lewis, which has been owned by its employees since the 1920s, is mulling outside investment of up to £2bn. That would mean selling a major stake and compromising the "mutuality" model – held up just a decade ago, by the then deputy PM Nick Clegg, as a template for a fairer "John Lewis economy" in Britain. In hard times, "our mutual friend" faces being dragged into the modern world, said Lex in the FT. "Progress is often a case of necessity over choice."

Issue of the week: the fall of Credit Suisse

The rescue of a once-mighty Swiss bank has exacerbated the "too big to fail" problem



Riot police guarding Credit Suisse in Zürich

To paraphrase former Bank of England governor Mervyn King, "most banks are global in life but national in death". That is certainly true for Credit Suisse, said the FT. It was brought to its knees in the turmoil that followed the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank; not even last week's $54bn liquidity lifeline from the Swiss National Bank could "stem the crisis of confidence". Shares continued to slump and the flight of deposits accelerated, until the Swiss authorities stepped in at the weekend to broker a deal for the sale of the troubled institution to UBS, its "more successful Swiss rival". As the only viable Swiss buyer, UBS was able to drive a hard bargain; and after "intense negotiations", Credit Suisse was sold for $3.2bn – less than half of its prior market value. On the plus side, the deal has "prevented a globally important bank from failing"; on the downside, it could have "troubling repercussions".

It certainly could, agreed The Economist. The structure of the hastily arranged deal – notably a decision to write off $17bn in Credit Suisse's additional tier 1 (AT1) bonds, yet to make a small payment to shareholders – caused real anger and bewilderment in the market. Why? Because it tore up the established "post-collapse pecking order", in which senior bondholders have a right to payouts first, followed by AT1 bondholders, and only then shareholders, "who in theory take first losses". Also known as contingent convertible (CoCo) bonds, AT1s were "part of the toolkit introduced after the global financial crisis" to prevent future bailouts, and have grown into a market worth $275bn. "The Swiss authorities opened a can of worms," said Nils Pratley in The Guardian. Panic that they may have killed the CoCo market was only allayed when the European Central Bank and Threadneedle Street each vowed to uphold the previous hierarchy.

"A legal battle is brewing" as wiped out Credit Suisse bondholders consider their options, said Ben Martin in The Times. And that's not the only trouble. The takeover is expected to lead to thousands of job cuts at Credit Suisse, with the City especially badly affected. "The best that can be said" for the rescue "is that it appears to have averted a full-blown banking crisis", said Ben Marlow in The Daily Telegraph. But at what cost? To smooth the deal, Swiss authorities provided a staggering £230bn of emergency liquidity and loans – equivalent to over a third of the country's GDP. If Credit Suisse was a giant deemed too big to fail, "the combined UBS-Credit Suisse will be a behemoth" with "even greater global systemic importance", said the FT. Its combined assets are roughly twice the size of the Swiss economy. This takeover had better succeed.

New pension rules: what the experts think

● A pensions gift

Jeremy Hunt's shock move to abolish the "lifetime allowance limit" (LTA) on pensions saving has "opened the door for retirement pots to become the ultimate financial planning tool", said Sam Meadows in The Daily Telegraph. The little-lamented curb capped the amount that could be saved into a pension at just over £1m – after which, savers faced "draconian" tax charges. Now, theoretically, the sky's the limit. The move has been criticised as "a handout to the wealthiest". However, analysis by insurer NFU Mutual shows that "those earning a relatively modest £50,000 a year could easily amass a retirement pot which breached the old limit". Indeed, numbers falling foul of it were expected to soar. Hunt's pensions bonanza also included a generous uplift in the annual allowance you can save: from £40,000 to £60,000 – making "pensions an excellent way of dodging death duties for those who plan ahead".

● An unlimited tax shelter?

If you die before you're 75, your pension can be passed to beneficiaries tax-free. So by scrapping the LTA, Hunt created "an unlimited inheritance tax shelter", said the FT. "But it's complicated." Those with big pots and the over-75s are advised to consult financial planners – particularly if they have some form of historical LTA protection. Maximising pension contributions might also be difficult if your income exceeds £260,000, where the tapered annual cap kicks in. These caveats aside, NFU Mutual analysts reckon the move could transform how we save. "We will see more people taking money from Isas and investments which are subject to inheritance tax before accessing their pensions."

● Hang on to your Isa

The perennial problem when it comes to saving for the long term is politicians moving the goalposts, said John Stepek on Bloomberg. Labour has already said it would reimpose the LTA if elected. So take advantage of the rule changes if you can, "but don't bet on them being permanent". And don't neglect your Isa. The latter didn't even rate a mention in the Budget, which was frankly welcome. "The less inclined politicians are to fiddle with them, the more attractive they become." Take a belt-and-braces approach to pension and Isa saving. "Use both if you can."

Merch mart

The emergency takeover of Credit Suisse means the end of a bank that began life in 1856 as the Schweizerische Kreditanstalt, "to finance the expansion of the railroad network and industrialisation of Switzerland". So much for the history, said Anna Cooban on CNN. Bring on the merch. Within hours of the deal, hats, bags, gold bars and other memorabilia emblazoned with the lender's logo began appearing on Swiss resale sites.

"Dozens of bars of gold", stamped with the name of the issuer, were uploaded onto the country's most popular online market places, ricardo.ch and tutti.ch, said Reuters. Meanwhile, blue and red "CS" ski hats – "which were the height of fashion in the 1970s" – were getting bids close to SF200 ($216). There was also a brisk trade in stamps, old letters and sports bags. Credit Suisse's memorabilia is certainly "a cut above the broken office chairs and box files" usually left behind when companies fold, said Jon Rees in The Times.

In terms of value, much depends on whether UBS decides to keep the Credit Suisse name going. But there are alternatives. Merchandise bearing the logo of Silicon Valley Bank is also available on auction websites. Items range from jackets stamped "SVB finance committee" (optimistically priced at $1,000), to an SVB risk-management department mug – yours for a bargain £19.57.

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Commentators

Cold turkey is the only option

Julian Jessop

The Daily Telegraph

"All it took to trigger the latest [banking] crisis was the return of official interest rates to what historically would be seen as normal levels," says Julian Jessop. That doesn't bode well. Even if rates rise no higher, "the fallout from unwinding the long period of practically free money" – a hangover from the 2008 financial crisis – "could drag on for years, and show through in many different ways". One can speculate where the problem might pop up next. Italian government bonds? Japanese debt? But this adjustment will be painful across the board. "Weaker companies, and those with riskier business models" won't be the only ones struggling. This poses a key dilemma for central banks, this week contemplating interest rate decisions against a backdrop of tumult. How will they "square their responsibility for financial stability" with their "commitment to monetary stability" – i.e. getting inflation back down? One thing's certain. It would be perverse to tackle a crisis stemming from an extended period of very low rates with more of the same. "The chickens have come home to roost. We need to go cold turkey."

A banking crisis was long overdue

Larry Elliott

The Guardian

"Financial crises have occurred on average once a decade over the past half-century, so the one unfolding now is if anything overdue," says Larry Elliott. The pattern is familiar: banks tend to fail shortly before recessions. But it wasn't always thus. For 25 years after the Second World War, "there was a marked absence of banking crises" because lenders were more tightly regulated and played a more peripheral role. Reforms enacted after the Great Depression, including capital controls, "were designed to ensure governments could pursue their economic objectives without fear that they would be blown off course by runs on their currencies or turmoil in the markets". Over the past 50 years, a more liberalised, and much bigger, financial sector has overturned those curbs. And, however desirable, "there is not the remotest possibility" of a return: "there is no political appetite for taking on an immensely powerful financial sector". This has costs. "Economies dominated by the financial sector only really deliver for the better off" – and "the financial system as a whole is both inherently fragile and too big to fail". Crises are endemic to the system.

Guarding against an AI dystopia

Rana Foroohar

Financial Times

Some of the risks of artificial intelligence, "such as a *Terminator*-style future in which the machines decide humans have had their day", are well-trodden territory in science fiction, says Rana Foroohar. Others are less well understood. But the time has come for more "ethical guardrails" around these "potentially dystopian technologies". A paper published by Harvard academics and AI experts argues that we've reached a "constitutional moment" that requires an entirely new regulatory framework. If, for example, AI can generate "perfectly undetectable fake ID", what good are the current documents that allow us to drive, travel or pay taxes? "One thing we already know is that AI could allow bad actors to pose as anyone, anywhere, anytime" – making deception far cheaper and more prevalent. For now, we might start by forcing companies to reveal what experiments they're doing: what has worked, what hasn't, and where the unintended consequences might be emerging. "Transparency is the first step towards ensuring that AI doesn't get the better of its makers."

Derby: the new king of the railways

Robert Lea

The Times

Several places in Britain claim to be "the spiritual home of the railways". But only one can now say that it is "the headquarters", says Robert Lea. Step forward Derby, which has beaten off hot competition to host the head office of Great British Railways – the body key to Boris Johnson's plan for "a centrally controlled British Rail Mk2". Derby is home to the historic Litchurch Lane works (now owned by Alstom), which has been building rolling stock since the 1840s. Several other cities and towns – York, Newcastle, Crewe – boast similar pedigrees. Indeed, many assumed the obvious place for GBR's HQ was Milton Keynes, where Network Rail built a £120m operations centre employing 5,000. But apparently "it didn't make the shortlist". There are just two spokes in Derby's wheels. First, GBR "still doesn't exist and is not expected to arrive anytime soon", owing to "delays in the Westminster legislative timetable". Secondly, a logistics issue. As some Network Rail staff point out, unless you live on the Midland Mainline, Derby is "quite a difficult place to get to by train".

City profile

Shou Zi Chew

The former Goldman Sachs banker turned TikTok boss faces a steep challenge, said Carol E. Lee on NBC News. As efforts in Washington to ban the Chinese-owned app – deemed a security threat by many – reach "fever pitch", Chew has been preparing for "a showdown with lawmakers" in congress. His mission is to win over the Biden administration, which is demanding that the Chinese owners of TikTok's parent, ByteDance, either sell their stakes or face a US ban. He appears to have decided that safety lies in numbers. As well as citing TikTok's 150 million US users, he's playing the "economic" card – claiming a ban could harm the livelihoods of many Americans. As part of the lobbying effort, a posse of "several dozen TikTok creators" accompanied him to Washington.

A Singaporean army reservist, Chew, 40, has been TikTok's CEO for nearly two years, but has hitherto kept a low profile at his Singapore base, said Stu Woo in The Wall Street Journal. His central argument is that divesting the company from its Chinese owners "doesn't offer any more protection" than the multibillion-dollar plan he's proposing – which involves hiring a US partner, Oracle, to store American users' data and safeguard against Chinese influence. US politicians dealt with the threat posed by the Chinese telecoms company Huawei swiftly. But TikTok poses "a more complicated calculus". The potential political fallout from a full ban is difficult to predict. But the sheer number of users devoted to the app suggests that those with an eye on the next election would be wise to tread carefully.

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Who's tipping what

The week's best shares

4imprint Group
The Mail on Sunday
The world's largest promotional products group sells millions of customised pens, mugs, bags and so on across the UK and US. Profits more than tripled in 2022 and the divi soared. Shares have a £50 target. Buy. £46.70.

Bloomsbury Publishing
The Mail on Sunday
Thanks to its growing online US academic arm, and book sales driven by video reviews on TikTok's "BookTok", the *Harry Potter* publisher's profits are up around 14%. Well run: shares should keep on rising. Buy. 450p.

Greencoat UK Wind
The Mail on Sunday
This investment trust bolsters the UK's supply of home-grown power via its 45 offshore wind farms and more than 1,000 turbines. Led by "industry thoroughbreds" who aim to preserve capital and increase divis. Buy. 158p.

JD Sports Fashion
The Sunday Times
The athleisure retailer benefits from links with key brands (Nike, Adidas) and a "sweet spot" demographic of young cash-rich customers. Plans to open 1,750 stores worldwide and improve the online offering. Buy. 162.3p.

JPMorgan Global Growth & Income Investment Trust
The Times
This "consistent" trust has a good track record of beating the benchmark. Underweight in tech, it majors on pharma, consumer goods and service firms. Well diversified. Yields 3.8%. Buy. 447p.

Keywords Studios
The Mail on Sunday
Growth in the video-gaming industry has continued beyond the lockdown boom, and Keywords, which provides music, artwork and translation services, is a prime beneficiary. Profits are up 30%, with more to come. Buy. £26.42.

…and some to hold, avoid or sell

CLS Holdings
Investors' Chronicle
The office landlord, which owns assets in Germany, the UK and France, faces a falling portfolio valuation. Performing poorly due to the growing amount of un-let space, and debt is mounting. Sell. 146p.

Deliveroo
The Times
Shares in the food app are 77% below 2021's IPO price. Food delivery sales from restaurants are down, as costs from a variety of legal wranglings mount. Weak consumer spending could see ambitious targets being missed. Avoid. 88.68p.

Hammerson
Investors' Chronicle
The retail landlord has recorded another loss as higher interest rates drag down property values. Debt remains an issue, and there are doubts about whether rental income will rise. Selling assets. Sell. 26p.

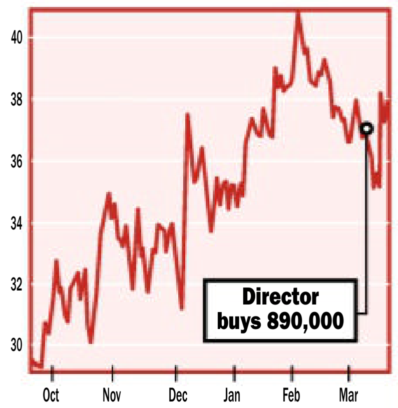
Hargreaves Lansdown
The Times
The investment platform is battling falling new-business inflows and slower client wins. Rising costs include the planned launch of hybrid robo-advice services – an increasingly competitive market. Avoid. 808.2p.

Robert Walters Group
Investors' Chronicle
The recruiter's global expansion continues apace, with headcount up by 25% and growing income from all placement forms. Yet its founder Mr Walters is retiring, and confidence is "beginning to wane". Hold. 510p.

Spirax-Sarco Engineering
The Daily Telegraph
This well-diversified engineer specialises in efficiency-related, sustainable solutions. Revenues are up 20% and it has been investing in growth opportunities. Strong finances allow for further acquisitions. Hold. £110.75.

Directors' dealings

SIG



CEO Gavin Slark is building up his shareholding in the insulation specialist, with the purchase of £346,299-worth of shares. Despite weaker demand in the home improvement market, SIG has increased its margin. But it still lags peers on most metrics.

SOURCE: INVESTORS' CHRONICLE

Form guide

Shares tipped 12 weeks ago

Best tip
Renishaw
The Sunday Telegraph
up 5.98% to £40.08

Worst tip
Bradda Head Lithium
The Mail on Sunday
down 21.43% to 5.5p

Market view

"When 'credit' — or 'trust' in the Latin sense of the word — is shattered, it is painfully hard to restore; and not just at 'Credit' Suisse."
Gillian Tett, on the impact of the scrambled Swiss bank rescue. In the FT

Market summary

Key numbers for investors

	21 March 2023	Week before	Change (%)
FTSE 100	7536.22	7637.11	-1.32%
FTSE All-share UK	4109.20	4167.88	-1.41%
Dow Jones	32392.39	32211.57	0.56%
NASDAQ	11748.94	11445.04	2.66%
Nikkei 225	26945.67	27222.04	-1.02%
Hang Seng	19258.76	19247.96	0.06%
Gold	1969.35	1911.30	3.04%
Brent Crude Oil	74.47	79.03	-5.77%
DIVIDEND YIELD (FTSE 100)	3.72%	3.68%	
UK 10-year gilts yield	3.52	3.60	
US 10-year Treasuries	3.56	3.63	
UK ECONOMIC DATA			
Latest CPI (yoy)	10.4% (Feb)	10.1% (Jan)	
Latest RPI (yoy)	13.8% (Feb)	13.4% (Jan)	
Halifax house price (yoy)	2.10%(Feb)	1.9% (Jan)	

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Best and worst performing shares

WEEK'S CHANGE, FTSE 100 STOCKS

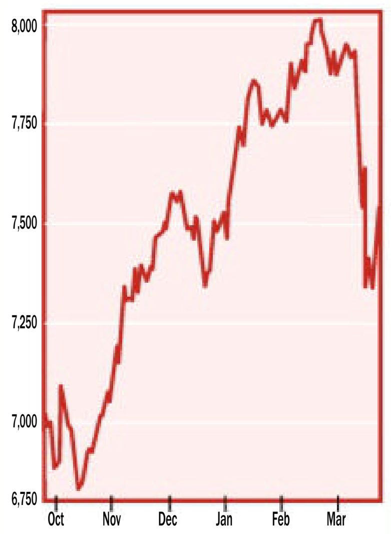
RISES	**Price**	**% change**
Rentokil Initial	561.00	+10.04
London Stock Exchange	7740.00	+5.94
Compass Group	1981.50	+3.91
GlaxoSmithKline	1428.00	+3.45
Schroders	467.60	+3.02
FALLS		
M&G	185.60	-10.94
Prudental	1065.00	-9.97
Standard Chartered	643.60	-7.63
Shell (Lon)	2310.50	-6.44
Anglo American	2601.50	-6.08

FTSE 250 RISER & FALLER

4imprint Group	5090.00	+13.90
Essentra	175.80	-17.50

Source: FT/Refinitiv (not adjusted for dividends). Prices on 21 March (pm)

Following the Footsie

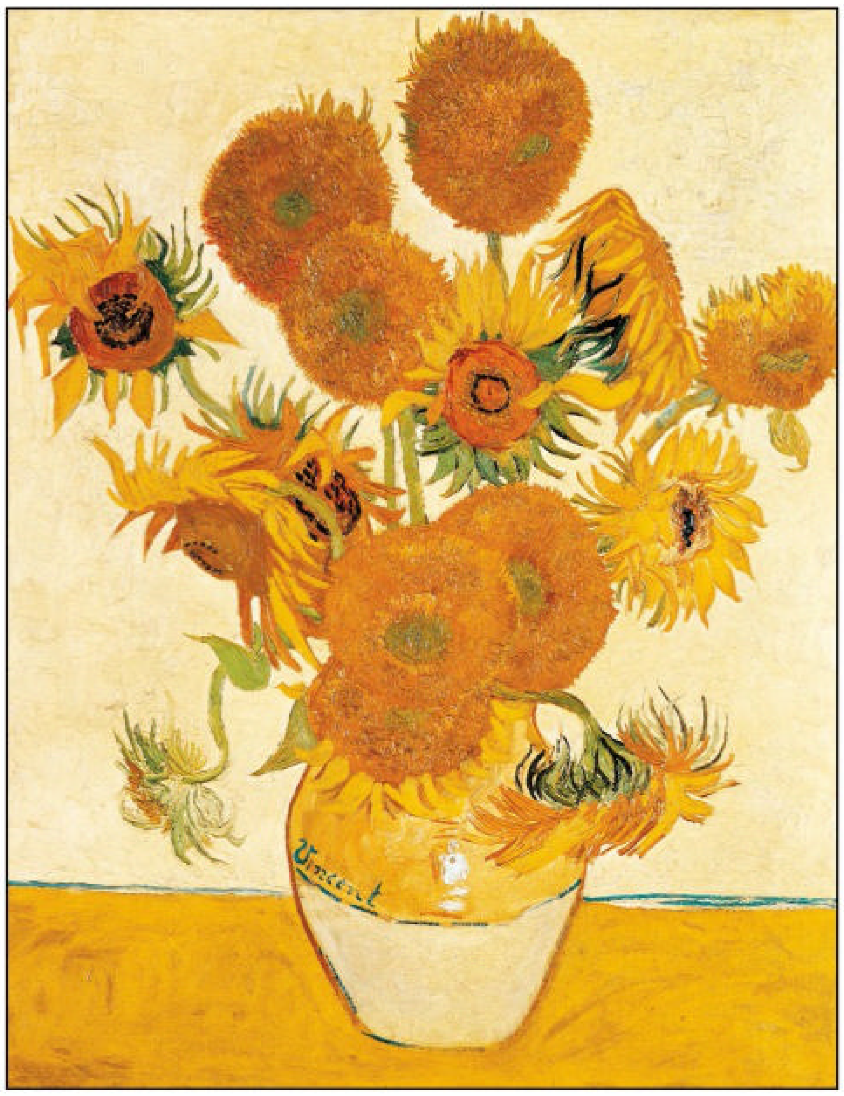


6-month movement in the FTSE 100 index

How Vincent van Gogh's family kept his legacy alive

Van Gogh died at 37, a complete unknown. But after his death in 1890, first his brother, then his sister-in-law and his nephew, worked selflessly to establish his reputation – and they were fabulously successful, writes William Cook

Here in Amsterdam, the Van Gogh Museum is throwing a spectacular birthday party – not for Vincent van Gogh, but for the museum itself. It's 50 years since the gallery opened, back in 1973. The home of the world's biggest van Gogh collection, it attracts millions of visitors every year. However, this golden jubilee isn't just about the numbers. What makes the Van Gogh Museum so special is its unique connection with three members of van Gogh's family – his brother Theo, Theo's wife, Jo, and their only child, Vincent Willem. It was this familial trio who kept van Gogh's legacy alive. Without them, the museum would not exist, and van Gogh would never have become the iconic figure who is so familiar to us today.



Sunflowers (1888) by Vincent van Gogh

The story of how Theo, Jo and Vincent Willem preserved and promoted van Gogh's oeuvre is a tale of triumph over adversity – a reminder that even the greatest painters can never do it on their own. This story is the subject of the Van Gogh Museum's new exhibition, *Choosing Vincent*. "We wanted to kick off our jubilee year with a big thank you to the van Gogh family," says the show's curator, Lisa Smit; but this exhibition does more than that. It reveals that this trio were central to van Gogh's posthumous success. It shows how they transformed an unknown artist into a worldwide superstar.

Vincent van Gogh's biography has become so familiar, it's acquired a kind of mythic status: the tortured, tormented genius toiling alone in his lonely garret, dying unknown and unacknowledged. Like most legends, there's a good deal of truth in it; but it also leaves a lot out. Yes, van Gogh had a difficult life that led him down the road to suicide. Yes, he'd only sold one painting when he died. Yet although he was often alone, shunned by polite society and neglected by the art world, he always had one man who believed in him: his younger brother Theo.

> *"Van Gogh was scratching a living as a teacher and lay preacher until 1880 when he decided, at the age of 27, to become an artist"*

Born in 1853, in Zundert, a small town in the Netherlands, the son of a Protestant pastor, Vincent van Gogh was the eldest of six children. He had three younger sisters and two younger brothers. He got along well with all of them, but it was Theo who became his lifelong soulmate, "My best friend," as Vincent put it. "More friends than brothers." Vincent's uncle was a partner in the international art dealers Goupil & Cie. Thanks to him, Vincent and Theo were both apprenticed to this prestigious firm. Theo prospered there but Vincent floundered. Fired by Goupil & Cie, incapable of holding down a steady job, he drifted around for several years, scratching a living as an itinerant teacher and a lay preacher, until 1880 when, aged 27, he decided to become an artist.

Vincent had a passion for art but he'd only ever drawn a few rough sketches. He knew it would be years before he could even hope to pay his way. He'd need to learn from scratch and he had no money to support himself. If it hadn't been for Theo, this improbable ambition would have been stillborn. A tougher man than Theo would have dismissed this as the latest fad by a man who'd roamed from job to job and never stuck at anything. Yet remarkably, Theo had faith in Vincent's artistic ambitions. Even more remarkably, he offered to support Vincent financially until he found his feet. In exchange for this allowance, Vincent gave Theo joint ownership of all his artworks. The idea was that Theo would sell them on his behalf.

In the long run, this turned out to be the investment of the century, but at the time it was a lousy deal. Theo could see that Vincent had some talent, but he could also see that Vincent's paintings would be extremely difficult to sell. Vincent was working hard and improving rapidly, and yet his gloomy daubs of glum peasants labouring in muddy fields under darkened skies were hardly the sort of paintings you'd want to hang above your mantelpiece. At least Vincent was suitably grateful for the lifeline his kid brother had flung him. Every month Theo sent him money, and every month Vincent wrote a long letter in return. These weren't just thank-you notes – Vincent poured his heart out. He wrote about art, religion, philosophy. He revealed his deepest thoughts. Vincent sent hundreds of letters to Theo, and though neither of them imagined they'd ever reach a wider audience, this correspondence played a key role in the creation of the van Gogh cult.

Vincent was lucky to have a brother like Theo. A more business-minded man wouldn't have been willing to support Vincent. A less business-minded man wouldn't have been able to afford it. For a while, Theo considered leaving Goupil & Cie to set up on his own, and Vincent egged him on. In the end, Theo decided it was too risky. It was a good job he didn't take his big brother's advice. Without a steady income from Goupil & Cie, Theo might not have been able to afford to bankroll Vincent anymore.

In 1886, Vincent went to live with Theo in Paris, and though he proved to be the housemate from hell, constantly driving Theo to distraction, living with Theo did wonders for Vincent's art.

Theo introduced him to up-and-coming artists such as Gauguin and Toulouse-Lautrec, who admired Vincent's work. Their friendship boosted his confidence and brightened up his palette. By the time he left Paris in 1888, to move to Arles in the South of France, he'd finally become the artist we know and love today. By now, Theo was engaged to Jo Bonger, a teacher and translator. They married in April 1889, and in January 1890 she gave birth to a boy, who was named Vincent, after his uncle (the elder Vincent was in an asylum at the time).

Vincent (left) and his younger brother Theo in the 1870s

Rejuvenated by this news, Vincent painted a beautiful picture of almond blossom for his new nephew; a painting that now forms the centrepiece of the Van Gogh Museum's *Choosing Vincent* exhibition. "He always looks with great interest at Uncle Vincent's paintings," wrote Jo, in a letter to Vincent, "in particular the blossom that hangs above our bed." A few months later, Vincent left the asylum and moved to Auvers, a small town close to Paris. En route he visited Jo and Theo, and their infant son. "Silently, the two brothers observed the quietly sleeping baby," recalled Jo. "Both of them had tears in their eyes."

Sadly, Vincent only had a few months more to live. In July 1890, in Auvers, he shot himself in the chest. Theo rushed to his bedside but there was nothing he could do to save him. Vincent was 37 years old. He left Theo hundreds of paintings, many of them painted in the last few months of his life. Six months later, Theo died from syphilis, aged 33. He left his brother's paintings to his wife Jo and their little boy. Widowed, with a one-year-old child to raise and now running a boarding house to make ends meet, Jo could have been forgiven for forgetting all about her late brother-in-law's unsellable paintings. Instead, she set about establishing his posthumous reputation. This process reached its peak in 1905 when Jo organised a massive solo show at Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum. Built around her late husband's collection, it remains, to this day, the biggest van Gogh retrospective ever staged.

> *"During the Second World War, Germany occupied the Netherlands, so van Gogh's paintings were hidden in a bunker in the dunes"*

An equally crucial contribution was Jo's compilation of Vincent's letters, which she published in 1914. Thanks to these heartfelt missives, we know more about what he thought and felt than any other artist. Van Gogh's millions of modern fans engage with him as a personality, not just as a painter; and that began with the publication of this book. Jo also built van Gogh's reputation through judicious sales, ensuring that some of his most iconic artworks ended up in the world's most prestigious museums. In 1924, she sold one of her *Sunflowers* to London's National Gallery. "She parted with it with pain in her heart, but she said it was a sacrifice for the glory of Vincent because she wanted this important institution to have an important van Gogh painting," says Smit.

Jo died in 1925, leaving Theo's art collection to her son – Vincent's nephew and namesake, Vincent Willem. She'd sold a few of these paintings, to pay the bills and spread the word, but the bulk of the collection remained intact. Vincent Willem sold a few more, but in 1927 he resolved to make no more sales, and in 1930 he loaned a large number to the Stedelijk. By now, thanks to Theo and Jo, van Gogh paintings were commanding big prices. Vincent Willem could have sold the lot and lived the high life, but for him these paintings were too personal to sell to the highest bidder. Instead, he chose to put his priceless collection on public view.

Partly, this was because he'd established his own career as an engineer and wasn't short of money. But mainly it was because he believed that his uncle's work should be seen by everyone. The Netherlands had remained neutral during the First World War, which safeguarded Vincent Willem's collection, but during the Second World War Germany occupied the Netherlands, so the collection was hidden in a bunker in the dunes. It remained unharmed, but Vincent Willem's war ended tragically when his eldest son, Theo (named after his father), a member of the Dutch resistance, was executed by the Nazis.

After the War, Vincent Willem retired from engineering and devoted all of his time to the collection. In 1962 he transferred all these artworks to the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, and the Dutch state set about building a new museum in which to house them in Amsterdam. After years of preparation, the Van Gogh Museum opened in 1973. "It's amazing that there's one place in the world where you can see such a large collection of his work, of all the different phases of his life," says Smit. Vincent Willem wanted to make the collection accessible, rather than merely preserving it, which meant building a museum with "a living and lively character", rather than "a warehouse shunned by the public and visited only by a handful of students and experts". He wanted a museum with a library, a lecture hall, a reception room and space for temporary exhibitions – all common nowadays but still relatively new back then. In particular, he wanted the museum to have a studio where visitors could paint and draw. "Anyone who enters the building has to feel welcome," he said.

Thanks to his inclusive vision, the museum still feels welcoming today. A striking, futuristic building, flooded with natural light, it seems more like a municipal arts centre than a posh art gallery. When it opened, some critics wondered if there'd be sufficient demand for such a large gallery devoted to a single artist. Today, the main challenge is to escape the crowds. The reason Theo's collection is still intact is entirely due to the selflessness and foresight of his widow, Jo, and his son, Vincent Willem. It's what makes this collection so personal and intimate. As well as 200 paintings, 400 drawings and 700 letters by Vincent van Gogh, it includes all sorts of artefacts from other members of his family. One of the exhibits in *Choosing Vincent* is Jo's original diary, on show for the first time.

"We have these things because of the family connection," says Smit. "The fact that Jo and later on her son dedicated themselves to the collection is absolutely essential to the Van Gogh Museum, because that's why such a large core collection was kept together – the biggest collection of van Gogh works worldwide." Would he still have become famous without Jo and Vincent Willem? Possibly, but he couldn't have done anything without Theo.

Van Gogh created images of unrivalled power and beauty – images that move us in ways no other artist knows how to do. But none of those paintings would be here today without the three people who supported him: his sister-in-law, his nephew and his faithful brother, Theo. As Vincent Willem said, at the opening of this magnificent museum, five years before he died: "Our goal is to make people who are free inside." It's a goal he shared with his uncle – a man he met just once when he was still a baby, sleeping beneath that picture of almond blossom, painted for him as a birthday present by the most extraordinary artist of modern times.

A longer version of this article appeared in The Independent © Independent Digital News & Media Ltd. Choosing Vincent *is at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam until 10 April*

© NATIONAL GALLERY; VAN GOGH MUSEUM

THE WEEK CROSSWORD 1355

An Ettinger pass holder and two Connell Guides will be given to the sender of the first correct solution to the crossword and the clue of the week opened on Monday 3 April. Send it to The Week Crossword 1355, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR, or email the completed grid/listed solutions to crossword@theweek.co.uk. **Tim Moorey (timmoorey.com)**

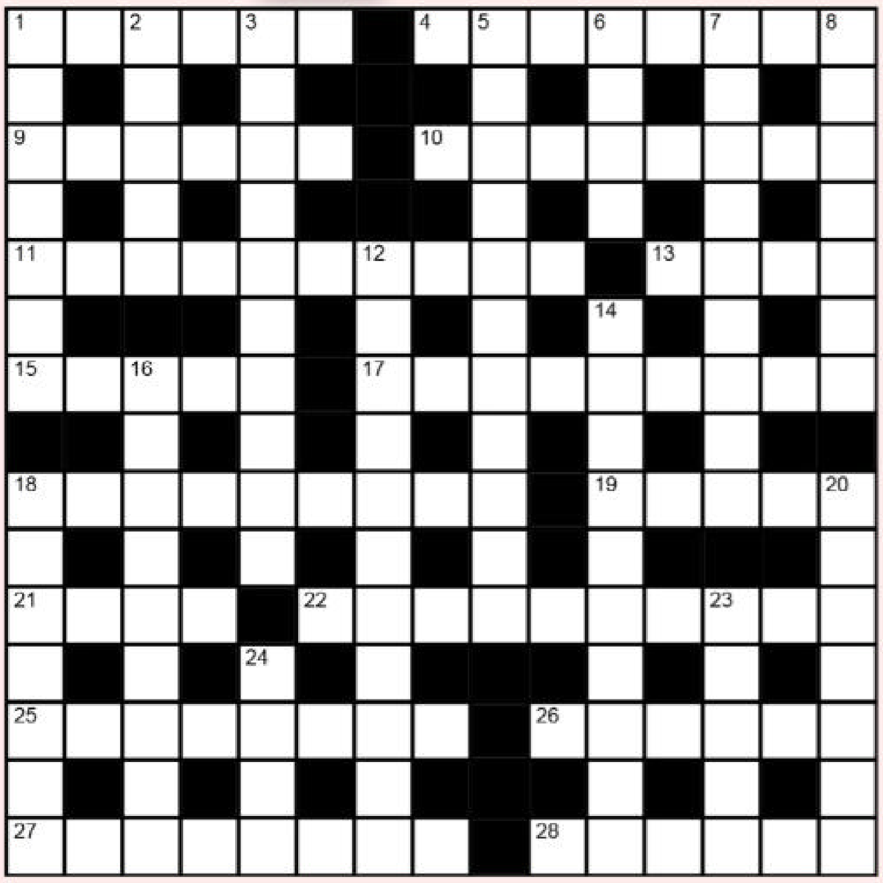
This week's winner will receive an Ettinger (ettinger.co.uk) travel pass holder in assorted colours, which retails at £115, and two Connell Guides (connellguides.com).

ACROSS

1 Cutters try to cut two seconds (6)
4 Mishap involving detective in centre of vessel (8)
9 Litre missing from favourite bottle (6)
10 Spot on lad's back removed from below disc (8)
11 Tom comes to pumas, say (10)
13 Noble peers holding sword (4)
15 Hooligans mentioned frills (5)
17 Will try to get last word before ten initially (9)
18 Norma say, in French side getting help (9)
19 Wet weather? Shelter in road (5)
21 Knowing of protest, avoid motorway (4)
22 Out-of-date paper from orthopaedic anaesthetist? (4,6)
25 Rugby position perhaps is first with it (8)
26 A flan's brought over in layers (6)
27 Male in street on left is a singer (8)
28 Working girl not working right away (6)

DOWN

1 Vehicle contest date is made up (7)
2 On the way up, some minister gets the bird (5)
3 Call mum back without name for one running the show (10)
5 Cut of meat that's very small? (6,5)
6 Dead trouble could come from Highland dagger (4)
7 Switch is one that's added to locks (9)
8 Tempting new colour? Tons wanted (7)
12 Blue material run out (11)
14 Raga playing but is soprano right for this string instrument? (4,6)
16 Info ad hoc prepared for supermarket hierarchy? (4,5)
18 Talk with actor, Pitt (7)
20 Rent trouble given by a twister (7)
23 Genius hit hard on the head (5)
24 Attention-seeker from Bishop's Stortford (4)



Name ....
Address ....
.... Tel no ....
Clue of the week answer: ....

Clue of the week: Like half-sized member? (4) *The Independent, Filbert*

Solution to Crossword 1353

ACROSS: **1** Marmot **5** Redbrick **9** Chancery **10** Reboil **11** Fiddlesticks **13** Onus **14** Parament **17** Dinosaur **18** Lyon **20** Moonlighters **23** Fiasco **24** Unsmoked **25** Playmate **26** Needle

DOWN: **2** Agha **3** Manifesto **4** Trendy **5** Royal opera house **6** Derisory **7** Rabbi **8** Chickenpox **12** Antisocial **15** Milestone **16** Manitoba **19** Nelson **21** Nasty **22** Sell

Clue of the week: Produce flight to east London? (6,3,5)
Solution: APPLES AND PEARS (Cockney rhyming slang)

The winner of 1353 is John Howell from Swansea

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Sudoku 897 (difficult)

7								9
		4		8		3		
	8		3		4		7	
		7		6		9		
	5		2		3		6	
		1		7		5		
	6		7		9		4	
		5		1		6		
4								2

Fill in all the squares so that each row, column and each of the 3x3 squares contains all the digits from 1 to 9

Solution to Sudoku 896

4	1	3	2	5	6	8	7	9
2	6	7	9	3	8	5	1	4
8	5	9	7	1	4	2	6	3
5	4	8	1	2	9	7	3	6
1	7	2	5	6	3	9	4	8
9	3	6	8	4	7	1	5	2
6	2	5	3	9	1	4	8	7
7	9	4	6	8	5	3	2	1
3	8	1	4	7	2	6	9	5

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Charity of the week

The Jack and Jill Children's Foundation provides a lifeline to families across Ireland through its specialist home nursing care for very sick children.

Every year, it hosts its Incognito art sale, in which the artist behind each postcard-sized original piece of art is kept secret. Once the sale concludes, the artist's identity is revealed to the buyer! With thousands of artworks from hundreds of artists, this year's event is set to be the best yet. Famous faces who have previously taken part include Bob Geldof, Bruce Springsteen & Patti Scialfa, Bono, Ronnie Wood, Tracey Emin and Paul Costelloe.

With artworks priced at €65, Incognito is the perfect way to start your art collection. **Check out the art on incognito.ie from 31 March, and register your favourite pieces before the sale on 26 April.**

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